FAMILIAR EPISTLES

TO THE

Rev. Dr. PRIESTLEY,

Of LEEDS, in Yorkſhire;

In which it is ſhewn,

I. That the Charges brought by him againſt the Orthodox, are applicable to none but People of the Doctor's own Perſuaſion.

II. That, notwithſtanding his endeavours to deſtroy the Doctrines of Chriſt's Divinity, and the vicarious Puniſhment of Sin, the Doctor has eſtabliſhed both, even to a Demonſtration.

III. That what the Doctor calls Rational-Religion, has, according to his own Account, been productive of the moſt unhappy and irrational Conſequences.

IV. That the Doctor's religious Pamphlets are a full and compleat Refutation of themſelves.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

THE SHAVER's SERMON

ON THE

OXFORD EXPULSION.

LONDON:

Printed for G. KEITH, in Gracechurch-Street; and J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard.

M.DCC.LXXI.

[Price One Shilling and Six-pence]

FAMILIAR EPISTLES

TO THE

REV. DR. PRIESTLEY.

LETTER I.

Reverend Sir,

CALLING the other day at your Bookſeller's ſhop, I ſaw a pamphlet lying on the counter, entitled, A FREE ADDRESS TO PROTESTANT DISSENTERS ON THE SUBJECT OF CHURCH DISCIPLINE, WITH A PRELIMINARY DISCOURSE CONCERNING THE SPIRIT OF CHRISTIANITY AND THE CORRUPTION OF IT BY FALSE NOTIONS OF RELIGION, BY JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L. L. D. F. R. S. and which the bookſeller recommended to me *as a very ſenſible pamphlet*. Forgetting that it is the buſineſs of a dealer to ſpeak well of the commodity he ſells, I took the book upon his recommendation, ſomewhat encouraged by the enſigns of honour which the author trailed after him, as L. L. D. F. R. S. ſuppoſing, that little imperfection could lurk under ſuch ſpecious titles: but if I live to buy another new book, I ſhall pay more regard to my own judgment, than to the bookſeller's recommendation; for to tell you the truth Doctor your performance does not altogether anſwer the character with which it was honoured. I had not read far in your Preliminary Diſcourſe, ere I formed a deſign of commencing your humble correſpondent; the further I read, the more my purpoſe was confirmed,

which the better to execute, I waited on your bookſeller again to procure ſome more of your pamphlets. To him I communicated my deſign of commencing hoſtilities againſt your writings. He benevolently wiſhed me to take care of myſelf, alledging that I ſhould find the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley an able antagoniſt. I like him the better for that, ſaid I, for there will be the more honour in contending with him; beſides, there is ſome chance of his deeming me ſo diminutive as to leave me entirely poſſeſſed of the field, and that will be thought by many to be a compleat victory on my ſide, that is, on the ſide of common ſenſe.

As you, Sir, have ingroſſed the whole of rational religion on your ſide of the queſtion, you cannot be offended if I lay claim to common ſenſe as my companion. And now to clear the way to a fair field for our literary combat, permit me to tell you that I myſelf am not in the higheſt eſtimation for orthodoxy; nor have the Orthodox Diſſenters ſo much as hinted a deſire of my appearing your antagoniſt; neither have any of them ſuch an high opinion of either my learning or abilities, as to ſuppoſe me capable of diſcomfitting the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley. On the contrary, I am credibly informed that many of them are exceedingly grieved at my precipitancy and fool-hardineſs in daring to attack a gentleman ſo very much my ſuperior in all reſpects. Whether theſe good people tremble with a pious fear for the ark of the Lord, or indulge a ſecret envy againſt me for aſſuming honour ſo eminent, and are afraid that I may appear in a more advantageous point of view than they could wiſh, I have not as yet been able to diſcover. But this I can aſſure you, that the undertaking is quite voluntary; there-

if a ſhameful defeat ſhould, in the iſſue, be my lot, let the diſgrace of it be candidly laid at my door, as a brat entirely of my own begetting.

As it is not my intention to call any names, to rake up the duſt of any of the dead, or in the leaſt to meddle with your private perſonal character, or education, which I believe has been much more liberal than that to which I have any pretenſions. I beg we may have no talk of burning our bibles, or hanging, ſhooting, or drowning ourſelves, as in the controverſy between the Rev. Mr. Venn and yourſelf *, you politely have adviſed him to threaten in future. There will be no occaſion for the leaſt degree of perſonal abuſe between you and me, if we both act up to our profeſſion, *of ſimply ſeeking out the truth.* But as much ſtudy is a wearineſs of the fleſh, it ſhall be lawful for us, now and then, to accompany our ſerious argument with a little ridicule, and to ſneer jocoſely at each other's folly; for which I perceive your reverence poſſeſſeth very reſpectable talents, as appears from your letter to the Vicar of Huddersfield.

I blame the Proteſtant Diſſenter for expreſſing his fear of your great abilities in point of ridicule; ſeeing every one who engages in religious controverſy muſt expect to meet with it, unleſs there be an happy defect of genius attending his antagoniſt. Religious controverſies differ from all others in this, that they rouſe up the little wit we are poſſeſſed of; or, if deſtitute of wit, all the anger and ill-nature mixed with our conſtitution; for it is no uncommon thing for religious combatants to leave the ſpirit of the goſpel behind them, and by wrath to ſeek the

* Dr. Prieſtley's Letter to the Rev. Mr. Venn.

righteouſneſs of God: therefore, no man ſhould enter into controverſies of this ſort without firſt ſitting down and counting the coſt, and trying his own heart whether he has temper enough to bear the poignance of that ſatyr which he is likely to meet with, without injuring his cauſe by an unbecoming anger. Beſides, as ſerious diſquiſitions are very tireſome to read, how does the Proteſtant Diſſenter think that the reader can have patience to keep the diſputants company, unleſs the muſcles of his countenance are now and then relaxed into a pleaſant grin by a home ſtroke of ſatyrical wit? But ill-nature being diſcovered, though it ſhould be even religious ill-nature, is ſure to give diſguſt to every reader of common underſtanding.

I confeſs that, of late years, I myſelf alſo am inclined to think that, to load infidels with epithets of reproach, is not the happieſt method of attempting their converſion; and I hope to convince you, Sir, ere I have done, that, for the very ſame reaſon, Dr. Prieſtley takes the wrong way to lead the Orthodox Diſſenters to correct the errors into which he ſuppoſes them to have fallen. Neither do I as yet ſee cauſe to be in any wiſe angry with a man, becauſe God has not given him the ſame degree of rational diſcernment which I flatter myſelf he has conferred on me: nor would I ſcold at thoſe who do not ſpeak well of that goſpel which, I believe in my heart to be hid from their eyes. If people are in circumſtances dangerous to their everlaſting concerns, they are certainly more proper objects of my pity than of my reſentment. With as much propriety might I be offended at a poor man who was born blind and continues ſo, becauſe he is not a judge of colours, or with a deaf man, becauſe he

underſtands not the harmony of ſounds. But if one will take upon him to prate about colour which are only diſcernable by the eye, and the other will attempt to diſplay the beauties of harmony which can only be perceived by the ear ;— you know, Doctor, I may very conſiſtently laugh at their folly, even whilſt I pity them for their want of ſight and hearing. However, I forbid all anger between you and me, as we are pretty near upon a par in this reſpect, each of us firmly believing himſelf to be the furtheſt enlightened.

I am perſuaded that two men cannot be found who in general differ more widely than Dr. Prieſtley and myſelf, and that too in the very fundamentals of the Chriſtian faith, and yet there are ſome things in which we are perfectly agreed ; and although I conſider your ſyſtem, in general, as utterly inconſiſtent with that goſpel in which lies all my hope, I diſcern ſomething in your writing that is worthy of imitation. The openneſs and freedom with which you expreſs your ſentiments, though frequently, as I think, crude and indigeſted, undoubtedly prove the uprightneſs of your intentions, and effectually exculpate you from the charge of diſingenuity and wilful perverſion of truth : which is further apparent from your readineſs to correct what appears to you upon convincing evidence to have been wrong in former publications, as in your additions to the addreſs on the Lord's ſupper. This ſymptom of genuine uprightneſs is ſo ſingular, and ſo rarely found in controverſial writers, that I thought I could not do you juſtice, without taking particular notice of it, notwithſtanding I profeſs myſelf an avowed enemy to what you call Rational Chriſtianity. And I aſſure you, Sir, I hold myſelf obliged to follow *Dr. Prieſtley*, in this part of his conduct, whenever my cir-

cumſtances ſhall call me to it, which perhaps may be ſooner than I at preſent expect. But, as it is quite unfaſhionable for polemic writers to ſtand long in beſtowing panegyrics upon their antagoniſts, like counſellors at the bar, I proceed to inform you, that my preſent buſineſs is not to compliment much farther, but to point out more miſtakes for your correction and amendment.

Having got in a great meaſure free, as I think, from the trammels of tradition myſelf, ſo as to regard no authority diſtinct from that of Chriſt in the ſcripture, and to follow no man, or ſett of men, knowingly, one hairs-breadth farther than he, or they follow the bleſſed Jeſus; I ſhould not have cared to enter the liſts with you if you had not declared your belief of the ſcriptures, as the only rule of faith and duty. For if fathers and reformers are admitted as deciſive judges in religious controverſy, the authority of the ſcriptures is not only abridged, and the Redeemer's glory, as prophet and lawgiver in his church eclipſed, but the ſubject is more perplexed, and the iſſue of the debate greatly protracted. I heartily concur with you in "believing the bible to be the only rule;" and to adopt your own words, ſincerely "*wiſh that all perſons, of all ſects and parties, would ſtudy their bibles more, and books of controverſy leſs* †." Yet I ſhall have no objection to all people, of all ſects, reading what may paſs between you and me. I am ready to think, indeed, that it is uſual for polemic writers to ſuppoſe that all books of controverſy are hurtful, except thoſe, of which they themſelves happen to be the authors. For inſtance, there is no man

† Conſiderations on Differences of Opinion, &c. pag. 24.

ever

ever exclaimed more againſt controverſy, as pernicious to the ſouls of men and the intereſts of true religion, than the reverend Mr. *John Weſley*, and yet I do not know one man who has been more frequently dabbling in that polluting puddle, than *John Weſley, A. M. ſometime Fellow of Lincoln-College, Oxford.*

The profeſſed principle, Sir, upon which you ſet out page 1, of the Preliminary Diſcourſe, is alſo very agreeable to me; and by it I mean to try the fabric you have built upon it; therefore ſhall recite it at large in this place; then I ſhall openly avow what I deſign in the following letters.

"*Every ſet of religious ſentiments muſt have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and caſt of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct. Chriſtianity is by no means an exception to this general obſervation. Its effect upon the diſpoſition of the mind is peculiar to itſelf; and except we* FEEL *as Chriſtians, we cannot* ACT *as ſuch* †."

By this rule, let the religion of the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley and that of his humble ſervant be tried, and that which really produceth the worſt effects, be rejected as ſpurious, irrational, and unſcriptural. Dependent upon the bible, a better rule could hardly have been given than this of your own. "*Every ſet of religious ſentiments*," rational and irrational, orthodox and heretical, "*muſt have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and caſt of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct.*" "*Muſt*," from the nature of things, and the relation between cauſe and effect; inſomuch, that from the temper and conduct of any man, you may

† Prel. Diſc. pag. 3.

from

from Dr. Prieſtley's maxim, form an exact idea of the propriety or impropriety of his religious ſentiments. You ſay, "*that Chriſtianity is by no means an exception to this general obſervation:*" I hope not. For my part, I can form no idea of ſuch a Chriſtianity as hath not a proper influence upon thoſe who cordially embrace it: of courſe, had I been in your place, I ſhould have deemed this remark altogether ſuperfluous and unneceſſary. But I dare ſay, that you and I have very different views of Chriſtianity itſelf, whatever agreement there may be between us reſpecting its effects upon the temper and conduct of its profeſſors. The goſpel which Paul preached, and the other goſpel which he ſuppoſed ſome others might preach, are, no doubt, each of them productive of effects ſuitable to their different natures.

Having thus ſettled preliminaries, I will now, Sir, point out the ground I intend to occupy, and the method by which the combat is to be managed; for I muſt aſſure you I am ſomewhat like the hero, who would fight only after his own country faſhion.

1. I ſhall give you a little gentle correction for your want of charity for thoſe ſame orthodox gentlemen, and teach you, for the future, to uſe your betters either with more reſpect, or to be more conſiſtent in your cenſure.

2. I deſign to prove that much of the Phariſee lurks under the ſpecious name of Rational Diſſenter, which you are pleaſed to aſſume, to diſtinguiſh yourſelf from others whom you call Orthodox.

3. I ſhall ſhew you how perplexed you have rendered the doctrines of the perſon of Chriſt, of the atonement, &c.

4. Gloſs

4. Gloſs a little upon the viſible, well-atteſted fruits of your divinity, as they diſcover themſelves among the Rational Diſſenters.

And, laſtly, if any thing beſides occur to me whilſt I am diſcuſſing theſe points, I ſhall make no ſcruple of ſuper-adding it to my plan.

Thus, Sir, I have gone as far as I intended in my firſt letter; ſo ſhall conclude, with aſſuring you that I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your very humble Servant.

LETTER

LETTER II.

To the Rev. Joſeph Prieſtley, L.L.D. F.R.S.

Reverend Sir,

I AM abundantly the more careful in reciting the honours of your name, that the public may ſee the dignity of the company which I chooſe to keep; according to an ancient injunction laid upon me by my father, who had he lived to ſee this day, would have rejoiced that I had got ſuch an honourable correſpondent as yourſelf. I think, indeed, that by this time, we may eſteem you as the moſt rational advocate of the Rational Diſſenters, if we may judge by the eminent figure you make amongſt them. I, for my part am, from the reſpectableneſs of your talents, very willing to believe that you are the fitteſt perſon with whom they could truſt the management of their cauſe againſt all that are called Orthodox. But, in the name of common ſenſe, and *rational religion*, what have the Orthodox Diſſenters done to the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley, that he ſhould ſet them forth in ſuch a diſagreeable point of view, and treat them in a manner ſo ſevere and unmerciful? Really, Doctor, you convince me, that you are but a man of like paſſions with myſelf, and not quite ſo free from the prejudice of party as you ſeem to imagine. To make uſe of your own words ‡,

‡ Differences of Opinion, page 5.

I really

I really think that "*we ſhould naturally expect more fairneſs, more candour, more meekneſs, and more generoſity from the* CHRISTIAN, *than from the mere* MAN OF THIS WORLD. *The paſſions of the latter (the man of this world) would be apt to run into perſonal animoſity, envy, jealouſy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmoſt zeal of the former (the Chriſtian) would not only ever appear to be conſiſtent with, but would be greatly productive of the moſt diſintereſted benevolence, and the moſt affectionate brotherly love. By this rule, we may, in ſome meaſure,* TRY THE SPIRITS WHETHER THEY BE OF GOD. *But let the utmoſt diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that we muſt all ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt.*" This is certainly a good rule; and I would obſerve upon it, that if we could only govern our ſpirits, as well as we do our pens, and act as well as we ſpeak, there would be more propriety in our conduct than there uſually is, and our character in life would be more reſpectable.

This being given as one of Dr. Prieſtley's ſtanding rules, "*for the finding out of ſpirits*;" upon ſeeing it, one would have thought that even the Orthodox Diſſenters ſhould have met with nothing from his diſtinguiſhed pen but the utmoſt candour, meekneſs, generoſity, benevolence and brotherly affection, which he himſelf lays down as the fruits of a Chriſtian ſpirit: eſpecially when we find him ſo ſolemnly and ſeriouſly deprecating a departure from this rule in the following words ‡. *God forbid that I ſhould take upon me to condemn any of his creatures. Himſelf only knows our hearts, and he will render to every man according to his works.*

‡ Diff. of Opinion, page 4.

But

But either the Orthodox Diſſenters are thought not to be the creatures of God, or the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley was of a different opinion when he wrote the *Preliminary Diſcourſe concerning the Spirit of Chriſtianity*. I am not abſolutely ſure which of theſe was the caſe; but this I am certain of, that in the ſaid Diſcourſe, page 16, and 17, having traced the ſpring of the "*penances, and tireſome repitition of Paternoſter's and Ave Maria's, as a mere bodily exerciſe, in the Church of Rome, and obſerved that it is pretty evident that going to church and attending prayers, is conſidered by many members of the Church of England in the ſame light.* You remark that, *this they look upon in the higheſt, and moſt proper ſenſe their duty, and they hardly ever attend to it as the means of cultivating good diſpoſitions, and fitting them for proper conduct in life.*" But it not being deemed ſufficient to point out the abſurdity of the papiſts, and of the good people of the Church of England, you go on to deal the ſevereſt blows among the poor Orthodox Diſſenters, as abundantly worſe, and more dangerous than both the others; "*and*, ſay you, *the frequent long and ſevere exerciſes, by which the Orthodox Diſſenters diſtinguiſh themſelves, are of the ſame nature. They ſerve to diſcharge their conſciences as a poſitive duty; but have little influence to improve their diſpoſition and conduct.*" From a man of ſuch moderation as the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley gives himſelf out to be, this might have been thought ſufficient: but the home blow is yet to come; and thus it follows: "*Upon the whole, I cannot help thinking that there is a ſtriking reſemblance between theſe profeſſors of Chriſtianity, and the phariſees in our Saviour's time, thoſe who ſtrained at a gnat and ſwallowed a camel; who devoured widows houſes,*

houſes, and, for a pretence, made long prayers; and that, were our Lord again upon the earth, he would treat them with the ſame ſeverity. Indeed Doctor! Is it poſſible that the impulſe is ſo ſtrong, that you cannot reſiſt it, but muſt out with it, in oppoſition to all your own excellent rules of meekneſs, candour, and benevolence. Could not you have recollected that juſt remark †, "*we are certainly all of us fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without ſufficient evidence*:" This rule would have pleaded ſomewhat with you in favour of the poor Orthodox Diſſenters, had it been obſerved; and I have not, for my part, ſkill enough to account for it, why great men ſhould lay down the beſt of maxims and rules for others to follow, without paying abecoming regard to them themſelves. I find myſelf juſt now under an impulſe alſo, and cannot help ſaying that the above ſerious admonition ‡ ſeems pretty near as neceſſary to the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley, as to the Rev. Mr. Venn, Vicar of Huddersfield: for his ſeverity to the Deiſts, &c. is thoroughly matched by yours, Sir, towards the Orthodox Diſſenters. What an inconſiſtent creature is man! for this ſame Dr. Prieſt-

† See Dr. Prieſtley's Difference of Opinion, page 31.

‡ The admonition referred to is found in Dr. Prieſtley's Obſervations on Difference of Opinion, page 5, "We ſhould naturally expect more fairneſs, more candour, more meekneſs, and more generoſity from the Chriſtian, than from the mere Man of this World. The paſſions of the latter would be apt to run into perſonal animoſity, envy, jealouſy, hatred, and malice; whereas the utmoſt zeal of the former would, not only ever appear to be conſiſtent with, but would be greatly productive of the moſt diſintereſted benevolence, and the moſt affectionate brotherly love. By this rule we may, in ſome meaſure, try the ſpirits whether they be of God. But let the utmoſt diffidence and candour accompany every judgment we form, remembering that we muſt all ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt."

ley, who takes upon him to accuſe, judge, and condemn the Orthodox Diſſenters, tells us plainly ‡, "*that there are ſuch well known inſtances of the force of prejudice, that he had rather aſcribe any opinion, how abſurd ſoever, or any defence, how weak ſoever, in a man how ſenſible, and intelligent ſoever, in other reſpects, to wrong judgment than to a bad heart*;" and, after all, moſt certainly aſcribes the conduct and principles of theſe ſame Orthodox Diſſenters to badneſs of heart, rather than wrong judgment; for there is ſaid to be a ſtriking likeneſs between them and the phariſees, who undoubtedly were influenced by badneſs of heart rather than miſinformed judgments. "*How ſhould I be affected at the great day of judgment*," ſays your reverence † "*to be convinced of the integrity, and perhaps the right judgment alſo of an adverſary, whom I ſhould have treated in ſo illiberal and inſulting a manner?*" This is intended for Mr. Venn's conſideration; and I aſſure you, Doctor, I think it will not be altogether amiſs that you ſhould a little ponder upon it yourſelf: for to give good advice to others, and to neglect it ourſelves, is ſomewhat like the conduct of watermen, who look one way whilſt they are rowing another.

Nevertheleſs, I aſſure you, that I by no means impute this inconſiſtency of yours to any diſhoneſty of deſign, but to "the force of prejudice, and wrong judgment," which has led you to throw out your cenſure, without fully conſidering its weight and propriety; or indeed how grievouſly it claſheth with your own avowed maxims.

Now, Doctor, that you may ſee the full ſcope of your cenſure referred to, I ſhall be free enough to animadvert upon it in my own

‡ Differences of Opinion, page 10. † Page 11.

way

way: and, in the firſt place, touching what you ſay of the Pater-noſters and Ave-Marias of the Church of Rome, and the prayers of many of the members of the Church of England being meer bodily exerciſes, I have little to ſay, having not yet attained to an abſolute certainty whether all that have uſed theſe things had no farther views in them than merely to diſcharge their conſciences. Beſides, I have but a very dull faculty, in point of diſcerning hearts, any other way than by outward actions; moreover, I think it not amiſs to leave it to the parties concerned to defend themſelves againſt your attack, ſeeing neither of them have retained me as their advocate. But, as for the poor Orthodox Diſſenters; you have uſed them ſo unmercifully Doctor, that common humanity would induce me to interfere, had I even no fellow-feeling with them in the common cauſe.

"*The frequent long and ſevere exerciſes by which the Orthodox Diſſenters diſtinguiſh themſelves, are of the ſame nature.*" As to the frequency of their exerciſes, really you muſt needs be miſtaken; for, to my certain knowledge, they differ little, if any thing at all, from the exerciſes of the Rational Diſſenters themſelves. Verily, Sir, it is my charitable opinion, that few, of either the one or the other, are in danger of damnation for preaching too often and praying too much. But their exerciſes are *long* you ſay, and this perhaps may be thought to give them a papiſtical turn. In this alſo I am of opinion, that the practice of the Rationals themſelves will exculpate the Orthodox. *Your* exerciſes, Doctor, will meaſure pretty near two hours in length; the exerciſes of the Orthodox, generally ſpeaking, never ex-

ceed, and very rarely extend to that time: ſo that I direct the jury who are to determine in the caſe, I mean the public, to bring in their verdict, *Not Guilty*, in favour of the Orthodox. The greateſt danger is likely to ariſe from the third quality of their exerciſes, namely, their ſeverity, which is by far the moſt puzzling point, as the Orthodox and Rational Diſſenters, I much fear are not very likely at preſent, perfectly to underſtand one another. Some of them, however, will be ready to alledge, that they enjoy as much pleaſure in preaching the goſpel, as Dr. Prieſtley does in his philoſophical reſearches, and that they are apprehenſive of no more ſeverity in the one than he is of in the other. Nay, they would be apt to go farther, and to aſſure you, that the moſt pleaſant part of their lives is that which is employed in the work of the ſanctuary. Now, really, Sir, it is not eaſy to ſay, how that exerciſe in which a man delights, can be thought by him to be ſevere: and I ſuppoſe you will allow that every man by his own feelings ought to be the moſt proper judge for himſelf. Far be it from me, by the way, to take upon me to determine the exact meaſure of ſeverity, which thoſe gentlemen feel in religious exerciſes, who are miniſters merely for the ſake of a livelihood. In general, it is a ſtated law, *That all currying againſt the grain is unpleaſant*; but what is this to thoſe who, having themſelves felt the terrors of the Lord are ſtirred up to warn men to flee from the wrath to come? Upon whom neceſſity is laid, and who are miſerable, if they preach not the goſpel? They are conſtrained by the love they bear to Jeſus and to the ſouls of men, to be inſtant in preaching the word in ſeaſon and

out

out of ſeaſon, if by any means they may be uſeful in promoting the ſalvation of loſt periſhing ſinners. The caſe you know is very different between theſe two ſets of men; and of courſe, their feelings muſt alſo be different.

But, "*theſe ſevere exerciſes of the Orthodox Diſſenters are of the very ſame nature with popiſh penances, and tireſome repititions of Pater-noſters, and Ave-Marias.*" O! Doctor, where was your candour, your benevolence, and your brotherly affection, when you wrote this diſcourſe? Indeed Sir, if Rational Religion doth not find out a more happy method of diſcovering herſelf, I ſhall never be able to join any of her ſocieties, but muſt even be content to bear the reproach of Orthodoxy. But, you know, and I know too, that popiſh penances, tireſome repititions of pater noſters, &c. are enjoined in the church of Rome with a view to procure the favour of God, &c. And you ſay that the frequent, long, and ſevere exerciſes of Orthodox Diſſenters are of the ſame nature. Permit me to aſk you if you really think that the ſame Orthodox Diſſenters perform their ſevere exerciſes with a deſign to merit at the hands of God? Perhaps, Sir, you may recollect who it is that blames them for phariſaiſm, for conſidering themſelves as ſaved, and ſecure in the favour of the Almighty, whilſt they ſuppoſe that multitudes are under his wrath, and muſt periſh. Turn, I pray you, good Doctor, to page 28 of your Differences of Opinion, and there ſee the ſentiments of the Orthodox, as "*that the grace that ſaves them is irreſiſtible and irrevocable, ſo that they can never loſe the divine favour.*" Certainly theſe words, if they contain their ſentiments, muſt utterly exclude all pre-

tenſions to merit in their ſevere exerciſes: and how then can one of your profeſſed candour ſay, that their exerciſes are of the very ſame nature with popiſh penances and pater noſters? I really wiſh, that our zeal for party-religion might not in future be injurious to common ſenſe as well as Chriſtian charity.

I pray you, Sir, how came you ſo well to know, that their frequent, long, and ſevere exerciſes have little influence to improve their diſpoſition and conduct? You know well enough, that your acquaintance with the generality of them is comparatively narrow, and your intercourſe with them very ſmall. And perhaps your acquaintance with any of them is too imperfect to authoriſe ſuch a ſcandalous ſtigma as this with which you brand them. Admitting that you have taſted of the bitterneſs of ſome of their ſpirits, and have ſmarted by laſhes from the pens of one or two individuals among them, will that be a ſufficient warrant for ſuch a general and indiſcriminating cenſure which you paſs upon them all? When do you think, Doctor, that you and I ſhall learn, in our controverſies, to do to others as we would wiſh them to do unto us? That is, to act up to our own ſalutary rules. But, as you ſay concerning the Deiſts, I may ſay concerning the Orthodox Diſſenters; do, Sir, ſit down calmly, and with ſerioufneſs conſider their objections to your Rational religion, and by no means treat them with that contempt which they do not deſerve.

The anſwer to the heavieſt part of the charge you bring againſt them, muſt be left till I have the honour of writing to you again; for I will not trouble you with too long a letter at one time,

time, leaſt the exerciſe of reading it ſhould be thought ſomewhat ſevere, like the religion of the Orthodox. I ſhall therefore conclude, remaining,

Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER III.

Reverend Sir,

I HAVE not yet done with animadverting on the uncharitable cenſure you have paſſed againſt the Orthodox Diſſenters: therefore, to make you ſenſible that you are not ſuch a competent judge of men, and of the ſpirits which influence them, as ſome may think, my buſineſs in this letter ſhall be to point out the real import of the dreadful ſentence you have pronounced againſt them, ſo as that all may read and underſtand it. But, as I would do the ſtricteſt juſtice to all men living, I purpoſe to keep up a proper diſtinction between Dr. Prieſtley as a Rational Chriſtian, and the ſame Dr. Prieſtley as an honeſt man, and whilſt I muſter all my forces to oppoſe him under the former character, I ſhall give him all due honour and reſpect under the latter. With this neceſſary diſtinction therefore in my eye, I ſhall proceed to ſhew that the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley, as a Rational Diſſenter, has drawn the moſt deteſtable picture of, and brought the heavieſt accuſations againſt the Orthodox Diſſenters, that I remember ever to have ſeen or heard; and by the way

That the ſame Rev. Dr. Prieſtley, as a man of philoſophic candour and humanity, has boldly acquitted the ſaid Orthodox of all the charges brought againſt them by the Rational Diſſenter,

by

by his pointing out another claſs of people, to whom his cenſure is perfectly applicable.

1. Then, Doctor, for I love to be methodical, let us take a view of the charge which you, as a Rational Diſſenter, bring againſt the Orthodox, and we ſhall find it truly alarming; perfectly unmixed with that amiable charity, ſo juſtly celebrated in your performances. "*Upon the whole I cannot help thinking, that there is a ſtriking reſemblance between theſe profeſſors of Chriſtianity, and the phariſees in our Saviour's time, thoſe who ſtrained at a gnat and ſwallowed a camel, who devoured widows houſes, and, for a pretence, made long prayers; and that, were our Lord again upon the earth, he would treat them with the ſame ſeverity* †." Why the phariſees in our Saviour's time ſhould be choſen as the original, after which the picture of the Orthodox Diſſenters is drawn, I cannot certainly ſay; having had but little opportunity of informing myſelf whether there is any real diſſimilitude between the ancient and the modern phariſees. However, were a ſkilful limner to copy the ſpirit and conduct of the phariſees of our own time, he would produce a picture even diſagreeable and ſhocking enough, without having the trouble and expence of travelling back the ſpace of ſeventeen centuries for a more perfect pattern. Now that we may the better know whether the Orthodox, or the Rational Diſſenters have the cleareſt title to the honour of being claſſed with the phariſees in our Saviour's time, it may not be amiſs for me to take down the *original* from behind the curtain, and a little to mark the outlines of that diſtinguiſhed character. This may bring the matter to a fair

† Preliminary Diſcourſe, page 17.

iſſue; and I believe I ſhall not need to put myſelf to much expence or to the trouble of ſevere ſtudy in this affair; for I have got what ſuits my purpoſe in an old ſermon of mine; for you muſt know, Sir, that I am, like yourſelf, "paid for haranguing the people once a week." I think you will agree with me that the Rational Diſſenter has diſcovered but a very ſlender degree of that charity, which Doctor Prieſtley ſo warmly recommends when he ſo poſitively declares that, there is ſuch a ſtriking reſemblance between the Orthodox Diſſenters and the phariſees; for,

1. The phariſees, in general, were hypocrites; and, as appears from the teſtimony of Jeſus, took up a diſſembled religion to cover their avaricious purpoſes; which muſt be the character of the Orthodox Diſſenters, if the reſemblance between them and the phariſees is ſo ſtriking as you, Sir, in the perſon of a Rational Diſſenter, have been pleaſed to affirm; but, how you could come at this knowledge, without having attained the wonderful ſecret of diſcerning hearts, is not ſo eaſy for me to comprehend. But the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley, in the perſon of an honeſt man, is abſolutely of a different opinion; for, to the confuſion of this uncharitable Rational Diſſenter, he tells us plainly, that † "*he would at any time rather impute the miſtaken conduct of the Orthodox Diſſenters to wrong judgment than to badneſs of heart.*" But, if the whole had not been imputed to badneſs of heart, this Rational Diſſenter had not been ſo exceedingly and irreſiſtibly ſtruck with the exact reſemblance. For my own part, I moſt ſincerely agree with Doctor

† Diſſ. of Opin. page 10.

Prieſtley

Prieſtley the honeſt man, and am ſo ſenſible "*that we are all fallible, and liable to adopt opinions, without ſufficient evidence* ‖, *that I ſhould not dare even to retort any thing which apparently carried in it a charge of hypocriſy.*" Therefore I ſignify it as my opinion, that the exhibiter of this charge againſt the Orthodox be ſummoned to the bar of the Rational Diſſenters, and on his knees receive a ſharp rebuke for having betrayed their want of candour and charity, which ought by all means to have been kept a ſecret, as they wiſh for the proſperity of Rational religion. Indeed, Sir, it never was my intention to charge your friends with hypocriſy; but if Dr. Prieſtley, who is ſo much better acquainted with them than I am, will do it, the blame you know, can, with no propriety, be laid at my door. And, to my certain knowledge, what the Doctor ſays of them, can with no juſtice be ſaid of many who are called Orthodox. That all may ſee that I do not bely you, Reverend Sir, I ſhall lay before the reader your own words, and then leave it to his determination, whether they actually amount to a direct charge of diſſimulation and hypocriſy. In your eſſay on Church Diſcipline, page 55, ſpeaking of the Rational Diſſenting miniſters, you ſay, that they "*entertaining ſentiments in religion different from thoſe of their people, and ſuch as their people would not have borne with; they endeavoured to keep them as much as poſſible out of view.*" This is a very fair and honeſt confeſſion indeed! In the truth and uprightneſs of your heart you have diſplayed the diſingenuous conduct of your learned brethren, without any

‖ Differences of Opinion, page 31.

regard

regard had to the conſequences which might attend ſuch a fatal diſcovery. I own, however, that it is ſomewhat droll that the Rational Diſſenters ſhould be the only people who are unacquainted with the real ſentiments of their miniſters; and it is every whit as droll that one of themſelves ſhould publiſh the tremendous ſecret, "that their miniſters are ſo wrapt in diſguiſe when they come to the pulpit, that it is impoſſible for the congregation to know of a truth that they are entertained with the real ſentiments of the preacher." This is one of the many advantages ariſing from the further reformation of religion. And really it is pretty clear that theſe ſame Rational gentlemen differ exceedingly from Paul the apoſtle, who ſhunned not to declare the whole counſel of God. For my own part I have not been accuſtomed to entertain ſuch a very mean opinion of the Rational miniſters, but I dare not reject ſuch teſtimony as that of the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley. Were I a perſon who loved to hear an evil report of others, as ſome people do, I ſhould be very apt to think that ſuch men were hypocrites like the phariſees; but happily for me, Sir, you have ſaved me that trouble and mortification by bringing home the charge upon them yourſelf. "*If the miniſter be a man of integrity, he will always preach, at leaſt conſiſtently with his real ſentiments* †." Indeed one would think ſo; and from hence it will be inferred that if thoſe, who are men of integrity, will all of them always preach conſiſtently with their real ſentiments, it muſt follow that thoſe who keep their real ſentiments as much as poſſible out of view, cannot be men of integrity; that is, they muſt

† Church Diſcipline, page 109.

be

be diſſemblers, for they diſſemble their ſentiments. This is very much like hypocriſy; but I will not abſolutely affirm that the gentlemen are hypocrites. Now, really, Sir, ſuch is my extenſive charity for you, that I could almoſt find in my heart to believe, that you made uſe of the name "*Orthodox Diſſenters*," as a cover to your real deſigns; and that, whilſt you ſay here is a ſtriking reſemblance between the Orthodox and the phariſees; you all the while mean the *Rational Diſſenting miniſters*, whom you did not chuſe to offend; and therefore cared not to mention them by name. And I think this is the moſt favourable point of view in which I can conſider your cenſure,—when I turn it into an honeſt, well-deſigned artifice for correcting the vices of your brethren; between whom and the phariſees there ſeems to be a very conſiderable likeneſs in point of hypocriſy, provided that your account of them is picturesque and genuine.

2. The phariſees, in our Saviour's time, gloried ſo much in their perſonal attainments, that they could come even to the divine throne, and each of them boaſt of his own worthineſs, ſaying, *God, I thank thee that I am not as other men, extortioners, unjuſt, adulterers, or even as this publican.* And Doctor Prieſtley I hope will give me leave to aſſert, that thoſe Diſſenters, who may truly be called experimental, that is, in the better ſenſe of the word, Orthodox, are ſo far from this ſpirit, that they freely confeſs themſelves to be the vileſt of the vile. You very well know, Sir, who they are that aſſume the name of Rational, by which they would be underſtood to be more enlightened than their neighbours. One would really think that this is in ſome meaſure like the ſpirit of thoſe gentlemen

tlemen among the Jews, who ſaid concerning Jeſus of Nazareth, have any of the rulers or of the phariſeees believed in him? But as for thoſe people who know not the law, they are accurſed. The Doctor's writings furniſh inſtances enough, how much he is enlightened above his fellows, and eſpecially above the Orthodox race, who do not, in his eſteem, underſtand the ſcriptures, and the religion therein contained. It is really a difficult matter to account for human conduct in general, or for your's and mine in particular, Sir; for whilſt you are pleaſed to charge the Orthodox Diſſenters with phariſaiſm, and of ſaying to others, "Stand by yourſelves, we are more holy than you," you are alſo pleaſed to lead us to behold, in the perſons of the Rational Diſſenters themſelves, the very deſcendants of the phariſees in the time of our Saviour. Self-veneration, according to both Dr. Prieſtley and myſelf, is one eſſential part of the character of a phariſee. That this veneration for one's ſelf and party, is, in any peculiar manner, the characteriſtic of the Orthodox Diſſenters, remains for the Doctor to prove at his leiſure; but that it belongs properly to the Rational Diſſenter, I hope his own words will be thought a very ſufficient evidence; at leaſt, with me it weighs mightily. Says the Rational Diſſenter, in his Diſcourſe Preliminary to the Eſſay on Church Diſcipline, pages 28 and 29, "*I am clearly of opinion that the character of thoſe who may be called the more free livers* (i. e. the more looſe and prophane, according to the vulgar dialect) *among the Rational Diſſenters, is, with reſpect to the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, ſuperior to that of thoſe who are, ſeemingly, the more devout of the other ſort,*" (i. e. of the Orthodox Diſſenters). That this

paſſage

paſſage is not quite ſo clear of the ſpirit of the phariſee as the author could wiſh to have it believed, I think will appear from our conſidering that he hath not been candid enough to admit even the ſincerity of the Orthodox in their devotion, but has repreſented them as only "*ſeemingly more devout.*" It is not given us as a raſh expreſſion or inadvertent ſlip of the pen; for he tell us, that "*he is clearly of this opinion*;" therefore, I proceed to give the true ſenſe of the paſſage in my way, and it may be thus expreſſed. The Rev. Dr. Prieſtley is clearly of opinion that the moſt looſe, and irreligious of thoſe who think as he does, *alias* Rational Diſſenters, poſſeſs more of the true ſpirit of Chriſtianity, *i. e.* are better men than the ſtricteſt livers, or the moſt devout amongſt the Orthodox. Whether this is not the depth of ſelf-adulation, and the very ſpirit of the phariſees, a ſmall degree of intelligence will enable every reader to determine. By the way, neighbour, I ſhould never have concerned myſelf with the beam which is in the eye of the Rational Diſſenter, had not your reverence ſo grievouſly magnified the mote that is in the eye of the Orthodox.

3. Another part of the character of the phariſees, is, that being ignorant of God's righteouſneſs, they went about to eſtabliſh their own, which is by the law, making void the righteouſneſs of God, which is by faith in Jeſus Chriſt. They had ſuch a fond opinion of their own perſonal virtue and holineſs, that they ſaw no need of Chriſt's righteouſneſs imputed to juſtify, or his blood to atone, but took it for granted that they were very ſufficient of themſelves "*under the common aſſiſtances of the deity* *," to do

* Dr. Prieſtley's Words.

every

every thing neceſſary for procuring the favour of God and the pardon of their ſins. What a conflict is here between your Treatiſe on Church Diſcipline and your Conſiderations on Differences of Opinion? The common oppoſitions to which all Chriſtian people are expoſed from their unbelieving enemies, are thought by ſome to be heavy enough to bear; but how much harder muſt it be, when a man becomes his own oppoſer, as in the caſe of the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley? His Treatiſe on Diſcipline very charitably affirms, that there is a ſtriking reſemblance between the Orthodox Diſſenters and the phariſees in our Saviour's time. I have ſhewn, that the phariſees in our Saviour's time, ſought ſalvation, only by the works of the law; and you, Sir, are ſo obliging, in your Conſiderations on Different Opinions, page 18, as to demonſtrate, that the Orthodox Diſſenters are ſo far from depending on perſonal virtue, or the works of the law, that they believe, "*that the univerſal parent arbitrarily ſelected out of the whole number, a few, whom he deſigns for eternal happineſs: and that, according to them, even the elect cannot be ſaved, till the utmoſt effects of the divine wrath have been ſuffered for them by an innocent perſon. The grace that ſaves them is irreſiſtible and irrevocable, ſo that they can never loſe the divine favour.*" Whether this account of the faith of the Orthodox be perfectly juſt, or in ſome meaſure warped out of the way of truth, is not the object of my preſent enquiry. It is enough for me to ſhew thereby that, the ſame Doctor who brings the heavy charge againſt the Orthodox Diſſenters, does in a very candid manner exculpate them from the guilt inſinuated; as the paſſage above recited, even in your own ſenſe of it, ſtands oppoſed to the tenets

nets and ſpirit of the phariſees. In ſhort, Doctor, we ſhall be obliged to go ſomewhere elſe to look for this ſame ſtriking reſemblance of the phariſees; for we have not as yet been able to find it, according to your wiſh, among the Orthodox Diſſenters.

It is indeed remarkable that Dr. Prieſtley ſhould repreſent the Orthodox as holding "*the opinion that men are entirely paſſive in the work of converſion and the new birth, entirely incapable of themſelves ſo much as to think a good thought; and that ſaving faith conſiſts in an acceptance of, or a dependence upon the merits of Chriſt for ſalvation, or what they are fond of calling, throwing themſelves upon Chriſt, or a reſting upon Chriſt for ſalvation* †." And yet, in his additional obſervations on the Lord's ſupper, page 28, "*to repreſent them as pleading and proclaiming their own goodneſs.*" How could you, for ſhame, Doctor, make your appeal to common ſenſe, in your letter to Mr. Venn? Had you taken her advice, ſhe would have made your writings as uniform, as they are well deſigned. But, becauſe you have affronted her, ſhe hath forſaken you; and you will eaſily gueſs where, I ſuppoſe that ſhe hath taken up her dwelling.

Now, Sir, as you and I are engaged in the ſame purſuit, I mean to find out the real deſcendants of the phariſees in our Lord's time, and each of us hopes for ſucceſs in his own way; will you give me leave to try how the coat will fit the Rational Diſſenters themſelves. The phariſees then could form no idea of the new birth and converſion, as a work of the ſpirit of God, in which the ſubject himſelf is paſſive. This is exactly the caſe with the Rational Diſſenters. And both the parents and children ſay, How

† Preliminary Diſcourſe, page 14.

can

can theſe things be?" The phariſees knew and believed that Jeſus was a teacher ſent from God; for they knew that no man could do the works which he did, except God were with him. This believing that Jeſus was a teacher ſent from God, you ſay, implies the whole of Rational Chriſtianity.

The phariſees held it to be blaſphemy in Jeſus to make himſelf equal with God, he being, as Dr. Prieſtley obſerves, and as they aſſerted, but "a man like ourſelves." The Rational Diſſenters hold it as the greateſt abſurdity in us to adore the bleſſed Jeſus as Jehovah's fellow, ſeeing, as they alſo ſay, he is but a man like ourſelves. Indeed, Doctor, here is a wonderful likeneſs between their reſpectableneſſes the phariſees in our Saviour's time, and yourſelves the Rational Diſſenters. How could you then aſcribe that honour to the Orthodox Diſſenters, which is ſo clearly due to the Rationals?

You tell us, in the depth of your candour, "*that the phariſees ſtrained at a gnat, and ſwallowed a camel, that they devoured widows houſes, and for a pretence made long prayers, and that there is an exact reſemblance between them and the Orthodox Diſſenters* *.

To

* This inſtance of Dr. Prieſtley's penetration in finding out the likeneſs between the Orthodox Diſſenters and the Phariſees who ſwallowed camels, devoured widows houſes, and for a pretence made long prayers, may be of the greateſt uſe to the curious, by enabling them to diſcover the full contents of every big Orthodox belly they meet with. For inſtance, whenever a curious Rational happens to meet with an Orthodox teacher bearing a prominent belly, he will be inſtantly ſtruck with a conviction that the Orthodox Doctor is gorged with the widows houſes which he has devoured. Had I the honour of being a Rational Diſſenter, and found this to be the caſe, I would certainly ſhew them leſs than the little mercy they have received from

To be ſerious, Doctor, do you really think that the Orthodox Diſſenters have ſuch a wide ſwallow as that a whole camel will down at once? Are you certainly aſſured that they are the very devourers of widows houſes which you repreſent them to be? And are you morally certain that all their long prayers are but a mere pretence? Think not to get off from the charge of uncharitableneſs, by alledging, that you laid not theſe things to the charge of the Orthodox Diſſenters; ſeeing you aſſert that there is a ſtriking reſemblance between the one and the other, and give it as your opinion that Jeſus would deal equally ſevere with the latter as with the former; which muſt, in your view, ſuppoſe an equality of demerit. Yea, Doctor, you are even ſo ſtruck with the diſagreeable likeneſs, that you cannot help publiſhing it, ſo that all may diſcern how much like the ancient phariſees you eſteem the Orthodox Diſſenters.

You tell us that "*if our Saviour was again to come upon the earth, he would treat them with the ſame ſeverity with which he treated the phariſees.*" He denounced every curſe and woe written in the law of God againſt the one; and, of courſe, in your charitable opinion, he would do the ſame by the other. If he would do it on ſuppoſition he was to come again upon earth, he will certainly do it now he is in heaven; for he is the ſame now that he was when in a ſtate of humiliation, being Jeſus Chriſt, the ſame yeſterday, to day, and forever. Is not this ſomewhat like judging and determining upon the ſtate of the Orthodox Diſſenters? A

from the Doctor; for I would follow them with proſecutions *pro bono publico* till they had caſt up every poor widow's houſe, which now lies in ruin with them.

thing,

thing, which you would not be thought to attempt for the world. O! Doctor, let me recommend to your ſerious conſideration the wholeſome advice which you ſo liberally beſtow upon Mr. Venn, reſpecting his want of love to thoſe that differ from him.

The ſpring of this ſo unbecoming a cenſure of thoſe, whom you are pleaſed ſometimes to honour with the name of brethren, ſeems to be ſome irreſiſtible impulſe upon your mind; for you ſay, "*I* CANNOT HELP *thinking that there is a ſtriking likeneſs, &c.*" I have heard of ſtrange things concerning impulſes which people *could not help* complying with; yea ſtrange accounts of impulſes, even to the greateſt of evils, have been heard of; but I ſhould not have expected to find a Rational Chriſtian reduced to the neceſſity of bringing the heavieſt accuſation againſt thoſe from whom he has the happineſs to differ. However, Doctor, to advert to that leading principle, upon which both you and I ſet out, and which is ſo well expreſſed in page 1, of your Preliminary Diſcourſe, we may form ſome judgment of your ſet of ſentiments by the influence it has upon your ſpirit and conduct. "*Every ſet of religious ſentiments muſt have its influence upon the mind, and will produce a particular temper and caſt of thought, which will greatly influence the conduct.*" Doctor Prieſtley finds himſelf under ſuch an influence that he cannot help bringing the moſt grievous accuſation againſt the Orthodox Diſſenters; from whence it would ſeem that his ſet of religious ſentiments has produced a very diſagreeable temper and caſt of thought in him; from which it is apparent, that *unleſs he feel like a Chriſtian he cannot act as ſuch.*

I am

I am afraid I have been too tedious upon a ſubject, which cannot be the moſt agreeable to you; and therefore ſhall ſtop ſhort before I have finiſhed my deſign, leaſt the exerciſe ſhould be too ſevere upon you, as well as upon

SIR,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER IV.

INDEED, Doctor, it is a certain truth, and all may depend upon it, that were I aſſured of having no other judge but yourſelf, I would much rather be a Deiſt, than an Orthodox Diſſenter, and that for reaſons ſtrong and ſubſtantial. Self-love and ſelf-preſervation are principles deeply rooted in me, and prompt me as it were by inſtinct to ſtudy my own ſafety; and you know, Sir, that it muſt be adviſeable enough for me, to wiſh myſelf of that party to which the judge is apparently moſt favourable. That you have but little favour for the Orthodox Diſſenters, is, by this time, pretty obvious; your tender mercies towards them are not altogether unmixed with cruelty; but your moſt cruel treatment of the deiſtical Gentlemen wants not a goodly ſhare of that candour and compaſſion which the Orthodox Diſſenters would be glad to participate. Your conduct towards the one has been ſufficiently exemplified; I ſhall therefore conſider what aſpect it bears towards the other. "*Let us then ſit down to a ſerious and impartial examination of the objections of Deiſts to Chriſtianity, and by no means treat them with that contempt and* INSOLENCE *which they have too often met with, and which they are very far from deſerving. But before we attempt the vindication of any thing*

thing (to which the Deiſts object) *let us firſt conſider whether we have any occaſion to vindicate it at all; that is, whether it really belongs to our religion, or whether it have only been generally ſuppoſed to belong to it*†." Now, why ſhould no the Orthodox be thought to deſerve the ſame candid and ſerious conſideration of their objections to the Rational ſcheme alſo, inſtead of being treated with that contempt and inſolence which they by no means deſerve? ſeeing ſuch treatment is likely to operate upon them to as much diſadvantage as upon the Rational, "*reflecting and irreproachable Deiſts*;" unleſs it is ſuppoſed, that, could theſe ſame gentlemen be brought over, they would make better and more Rational Chriſtians than the Orthodox. For my own part, Doctor, ſeeing theſe ſame Deiſts are ſuch a thinking irreproachable race, and their company of courſe ſo very deſirable, I give it as my advice, that, if they will not come over to the Rational Diſſenters, you and your good people would be complaiſant enough to go over to them, or, at leaſt, to meet them half of the very little way which the Rev. Mr. Venn has ſhewn to be between you and the Deiſts.

I aſſure you, Sir, that I am very far from treating theſe reſpectable Deiſts with either inſolence or contempt: I eſteem them as the creatures of the ſame almighty hand that formed me; as the deſcendants of Adam, and my fellow ſinners, I ſincerely wiſh their everlaſting welfare. To ſhow that I am ſerious, in what I ſay, give me leave to take this method of whiſpering the following ſecret in your ear, and that is, "I would rather chuſe to live under the

† Preface to Conſiderations on the Lord's Supper, p. 9.

government of a Deiſt than that of either a Rational, or Orthodox Diſſenter, providing that they were bigots to their ſeveral parties." I could give reaſons for this my ſo ſingular a choice, if I was in the humour, but, at preſent, ſhall reſerve them to myſelf, leſt I ſhould offend my good friends of every denomination. But, if theſe ſame Deiſts will take away the foundation of my hope, and revile the Saviour in whom is all my truſt, if they will deride that word which is ſpirit and life to my ſoul, no man can expect that I ſhall account them my familiar friends, or chooſe them for my ſocial companions. Chriſtian love will never require this of me or any of its poſſeſſors. Indeed, Doctor, you were wrong to reſent the diſcipline which the Rev. Mr. Venn ſo freely beſtowed upon you, notwithſtanding it might appear to a gentleman of your ſenſibility to be ſomething too warm, ſeeing that, on this head, you certainly gave him room for ſome ſuſpicion. Though, for my own part, I diſſent from his judgment concerning you, and do not believe you to be a Deiſt, nor a Pagan, nor an Atheiſt, but a mere Rational Diſſenter, uneſtabliſhed in any ſet of ſentiments for or againſt Chriſtianity, which the incoherence and indigeſtedneſs of your religious writings plainly teſtify. Moreover, I have conceived ſuch an high opinion of your uprightneſs, that I expect, as ſoon as you become actually a Deiſt, to ſee a defence of the Rational ſyſtem of Deiſm publiſhed by Joſeph Prieſtley, L. L. D. F. R. S.

From whom the Deiſts have received this undeſerved ill uſage, you have not been pleaſed to inform us; but I have a ſtrong ſuſpicion that it muſt have been from the unmannerly Orthodox, ſeeing the Deiſts and Rational Diſſenters

ters are upon terms ſo friendly and ſociable. However, I am perfectly agreed with you in this, that it is more becoming the Chriſtian, whatever the deſert of the Deiſts may be, to ſet down ſeriouſly, and conſider their objections, than to treat them with contempt and inſolence.

I now depart from the tents of Deiſm a little, to converſe with the Rational Diſſenters; a name, both new and ſignificant. I pray you, Doctor, who gave you this name? and for what was it beſtowed upon your people? You ſay indeed, that it is by way of diſtinction: But I would know from whom it can diſtinguiſh you, except from ſuch as are deemed irrational among the Diſſenters? Will the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley indeed affirm upon the word of an honeſt man, that there are none who may be called Rational among the Orthodox? Would not this be ſomewhat like ſelf-conceit, and the ſpirit of the phariſee, who alone knows the law when all others are ignorant? When Orthodox is oppoſed to Rational, are we not under a neceſſity thereby to underſtand *irrational?* Then the diſtinction between Diſſenters will be, *rational Diſſenters*, and *irrational Diſſenters*. Who are the Rational Diſſenters but thoſe who believe as your Reverence does; and who the irrational but thoſe who differ from you? Is this that humble ſpirit which you tell us Chriſtianity inſpires? It is indeed natural for a man to conſider his own ſet of ſentiments as the more eligible and conſiſtent, and it is deſirable to be eſtabliſhed in them, and fully perſuaded in his own mind; but it argues much of the phariſee to ſuppoſe that we are ſo infallibly right as to deem them who differ from us irrational. If you were acquainted with me, Doctor, you would ſay that I have a very ſufficient ſtock of va-

nity; and yet I aſſure you, that I am not vain enough to ſuppoſe that every particular article of my creed is perfectly rational and conſiſtent: however, when any one article is proved to me to be irrational and inconſiſtent with the goſpel of Jeſus, it hath no longer place in my confeſſion.

To diſmiſs this head I ſhall produce an authority which will by no means countenance the aſſumption of that honourable appellation by any one ſect of profeſſors to the diſparagement of thoſe of other perſuaſions. "*We are all fallible, and liable to adopt opinions without ſufficient evidence.*" Dr. Prieſtley.

"*All ſects and parties agree in the great duties of the human life; they equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us.*" Dr. Prieſtley.

Now if we are all equally fallible as you intimate, how comes it that one has a right to aſſume a name expreſſive of higher illumination than his fellows?

If all ſects equally know what it is that the Lord our God requires of us, let the Doctor tell me in what his ſect is more Rational than their neighbours? Indeed, Sir, there is a vaſt reſemblance of the phariſee here, and proof ſufficient that you have not as yet attained a perfect conformity to your own excellent aphoriſms.

I am amazed to find a gentleman of your high pretenſions to diſtinguiſhed reaſon giving ſuch a confuſed account of the Redeemer's perſon; it is indeed a difficult matter to find out whether, what you call the Rational ſcheme, or that of the Orthodox is moſt favoured in the hints referred to in your writings, which it muſt

muſt be owned, eſtabliſh neither. You tell us "*that our Lord took it for granted that his diſciples would form themſelves into ſuch ſocieties, and that thoſe powers, of admonition, cenſure, and excommunication, would be aſſumed and exerciſed*†." This appears to me to be more injurious to the honour of Jeſus, and more unfavourable to the divine inſtitution of churches and church diſcipline, than perhaps was deſigned by the writer. This *taking it merely for granted that they would form themſelves*, &c. makes the conſtitution of churches to be no more than a voluntary act of men, without divine appointment, rather than an inſtitution of the great prophet and head of the church. If we loſe the idea of divine appointment in the formation and government of goſpel churches, by what means can order and diſcipline be enforced? But we are informed that Jeſus continued forty days with his diſciples, after his reſurrection, before he aſcended to heaven, teaching them the things concerning the kingdom of God. That is, as I apprehend, concerning a goſpel church ſtate; and from the procedure of the diſciples immediately after his aſcenſion, in forming themſelves into an orderly ſociety, and eſtabliſhing a code of diſcipline, it would ſeem that the former inſtructions, and injunctions of their aſcended Lord were the only things which had led them to it. Allow me to ſay that this part of the apoſtles conduct without an expreſs command immediately from Jeſus himſelf, or mediately by the Holy Ghoſt, as the ſpirit of Jeſus, would have been equally impious with the kindling of ſtrange fire on the altar for which the ſons of Aaron were ſlain by the hand of the

† Diſcipline, pag. 121.

Omnipotent,

Omnipotent. A certain knowledge of the divine will was neceſſary in order to their entrance upon a church eſtabliſhment, and who is he that reveals this will unto us but the great "Teacher ſent from God?" To talk therefore of his taking it for granted, is vague and inconſiſtent. Moreover, it is highly derogatory to his perſonal honour, and ſuppoſeth that he was not morally § certain that they would thus form themſelves into a church ſtate, only took it for granted; whereas the very paſſage you there refer to, "*tell it to the church*," evidently ſhews that his diſciples had been inſtructed already in this part of their duty; and, if inſtructed, it muſt have been by him. This *taking it barely for granted*, leaving a doubt behind concerning the extent of the Redeemer's knowledge, very ill agrees with that memorable confeſſion of Peter ſo unfavourable to your Rational religion, "*Lord, thou knoweſt all things*;" all things paſt, preſent, or future; all things in heaven, earth, or hell; all things created and uncreated ‖.

§ This diſtinction between taking a thing merely for granted and being morally certain of it, by ſome may be thought not to be ſufficiently founded in fact; I ſhall offer in its defence a fact which may be depended upon. When I firſt read ſome of Dr. Prieſtley's philoſophical works, I took it for granted that a mind ſo expanded as his could never deſcend to ſhow a mean reſentment of the conduct of thoſe who differ from him in matters of religion: but the iſſue has ſufficiently ſhewn that I was very far from being morally certain that this was preciſely the caſe.

‖ When things uncreated are ſpoken of, the author does not intend that things poſſible to have been created, or that may hereafter be created ſhould be underſtood, but the Creator himſelf in his revealed ſubſiſtencies, and undeſcribable perfections of his nature. Believing firmly that God cannot be perfectly known but by God himſelf, and that Jeſus being ſaid to know all things is ſuch a proof of his proper deity, as all the enemies of that doctrine fight againſt as men who beat the air.

Whether

Whether it is ſafeſt for us to ſubſcribe Peter's confeſſion "that Jeſus even before his aſcenſion knew all things," or Dr. Prieſtley's, which ſays, "that Jeſus is but a man like ourſelves," and that he took it for granted his diſciples would form themſelves into ſuch ſocieties, &c. I ſhall leave my reader to determine. This favourite phraſe "That Jeſus Chriſt is only a man like ourſelves" you have been pleaſed frequently to introduce. I alſo rejoice that Jeſus is a man like myſelf: but I dare not aſſert as you do, that he is only a man like myſelf, having both the ſcriptures and Dr. Prieſtley's own teſtimony to evince the contrary; as I ſhall ſhew in its proper place.

There is a very remarkable paſſage in your Preliminary Diſcourſe, pag. 5. and which for its ſingularity, I cannot well paſs over without remark. "*It was probably an attempt to connect Chriſtianity with theſe* (pagan) *hypotheſes that firſt ſuggeſted the idea of Jeſus Chriſt having been a pre-exiſtent, ſuper-angelic ſpirit, the creator and governor of this world.*" It may be ſo, Doctor; but if it is, it will reflect but little honour upon the great apoſtle of the Gentiles, who evidently ſuggeſts the idea of Jeſus Chriſt having been a pre-exiſtent being by whom the world was made and ſupported, Col. i. 15, 16, 17. *Who is the image of the inviſible God, the firſt-born of every creature: for by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, viſible and inviſible, whether thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things conſiſt.* Now, as I have no other way of knowing what a writer means but by attending cloſely to the manner in which he expreſſeth himſelf, I am obliged to abide by the obvious

obvious ſenſe of the words he makes uſe of, which in this place and ſeveral others plainly ſuggeſt the idea of Chriſt's exiſtence before his incarnation and being born of a virgin. And yet one would really think that this holy apoſtle had no view to accommodate Chriſtianity to pagan ſyſtems of philoſophy, ſeeing Chap. ii. ver. 8. he ſtrictly chargeth the Coloſſians to "*Beware leſt any man ſhould ſpoil them through philoſophy and vain deceit after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of this world and not after Chriſt.*" He muſt have acted very deceitfully, and very inconſiſtenly, if he was ſtudying to reconcile Chriſtianity with any pagan hypotheſis whatever, when he ſo warmly cautions to guard againſt the effects of their vain philoſophy; one would really be tempted to think that he dreaded nothing more than ſuch an accommodation.

However I am not certain whether your deſign in this place be to combat your friends the Arians, who indeed hold that Chriſt was ſuch a pre-exiſtent ſpirit as you ſpeak of, or your old friends the Orthodox, who conſider him as having eternally exiſted as the God of angels; only, from your known attachment to the latter, it is preſumed that you will omit no opportunity of paying your compliments to them. As for the Arians, they are certainly nearer the truth, than their more Rational brethren who aſſert that Jeſus had no exiſtence prior to his being born of the virgin; and as for the Orthodox, they are kept tolerably in countenance by that declaration of Jeſus himſelf, "*Before Abraham was, I am.*" And however Dr. Prieſtley underſtand theſe words, it is plain, the Jews blind and irrational as they were, underſtood him, as, although not fifty years old, making him-

himſelf older than their father Abraham, and ſo ſtrongly expreſſive of his exiſtence before his incarnation, that they thought he deſerved death for ſuch a declaration. Notwithſtanding, Doctor, to give you your due, you have greatly confirmed the Orthodox in their ſentiments before you finiſh that ridiculous paragraph. But more of this hereafter.

Page 7. of the ſame Diſcourſe yields us an inſtance of ſingular Rationality, in placing the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt on a level with the worſhip of dead men, and as extinguiſhing the true idea of the Divine character and government. "*When the worſhip of dead men, ſaints, and angels, as well as that of Jeſus Chriſt was introduced, the true idea of the Divine character and government was wholly loſt.*" That the worſhip of dead men, ſaints, and angels, is, comparatively, of a late date, and that the introduction of ſuch idolatry into the Chriſtian church, naturally tended to efface the true idea of the Divine character and government, will not be denied by the Orthodox: but it muſt require ſagacity, not inferior to yours, to find out a likeneſs between this idolatry and the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt. Muſt we indeed account the worſhip of the Son of God equally idolatrous with that of *Thomas a Becket*, and other dead men among the papiſts? It occurs to my mind however that the worſhip of dead men, ſaints, and angels, is expreſsly againſt both the letter and ſpirit of ſcripture; whereas the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt is as expreſsly enjoined in holy writ; it is therefore far from being a proof of the ſtricteſt accuracy in the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley in placing them, as in this ſentence, on a level. I ſhould be glad to know who theſe ſaints are that you ſpeak of as the objects of worſhip, whether

whether they are dead men, or living men, or indeed of the human ſpecie at all; for as you are pleaſed to diſtinguiſh them both from angels and dead men, I am not a little puzzled to find out who are intended, "*When the worſhip of dead men, ſaints, and angels, as well as that of Jeſus Chriſt was introduced, the true idea of the Divine character and government was wholly loſt.*" Really, Doctor! But are you ſerious? Does the beholding of the only begotten of the Father full of grace and truth, deprive us of the true idea of the Father himſelf? One would really think that there is no method ſo likely for us to come at the true idea of the Father, the END, as beholding him through his Son the WAY which leads to him. We, for our parts, know no other way of coming to the Father, but by Jeſus Chriſt, though it ſeems that Dr. Prieſtley and the reſt of the Rationals have got a nearer way. Nevertheleſs, I will not affirm that you and your friends worſhip dead men any more than we do; but I have known ſome Rational Diſſenters as well as Orthodox ere now very remarkable for their devotion to living men; which is pretty near as prepoſterous as the other worſhip. I wiſh you would tell me, Doctor, when it was that the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt was introduced; for I find it to have been of long ſtanding; very current in the days of the apoſtles, practiſed by many in the days of his own fleſh, and always acceptable when the worſhipper came to him in a right ſpirit. Indeed, there is one inſtance of his putting a check upon a certain worſhipper, who came to him under miſtaken views of his perſon: he was a Rational polite Jewiſh gentleman, virtuous, and pious in his own way; one who conſidered Jeſus to be only a man like himſelf; yet, as a teacher

a teacher ſent from God, to reform the people, and point out the path of duty to them. Coming to Jeſus with great ſwelling words of reſpect in his mouth, ſuch words as were applicable to none who had not a perſonal claim to proper deity; the divine teacher put him in mind, that, if he entertained ſuch low notions of his perſon, his eulogy was abſurd, ſeeing God alone is eſſentially good. Some people there are who ſuppoſe that the worſhip of the Rational Diſſenters is near a-kin to this, and are very apprehenſive that it will meet with the ſame acceptance.

Dear Sir, what indignation muſt have filled your breaſt, had your reverence ſtood by when Thomas the apoſtle worſhipped and adored Jeſus as *his Lord and his God?* And how would you have blamed Jeſus, "who you ſay is only a man like yourſelf," for receiving this high adoration which could not be due to him in your view of things? Two things appear to me to be very remarkable in this inſtance of the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt.

1. Thomas acted juſt as if he had been an Orthodox Diſſenter, *in worſhipping Chriſt as Lord and God*, who Dr. Prieſtley tells us, "*is but a man like ourſelves.*"

2. Jeſus ſuffered Thomas to continue in his abſurdity and error, without attempting to convince him of them; yea ſuch was his conduct as tended to make Thomas believe that this adoration was cordially accepted. However, Sir, had you been there, I doubt not but you would even have done as your betters, the Jewiſh rabbies had often done before; reproved both the Lord and his ſervant. Two things apparently riſe from theſe conſiderations.

1. That

1. That Thomas the apoſtle was not what you call a Rational Diſſenter, any more than myſelf.

2. That the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt was very early introduced, and that of courſe, according to your notion, the true idea of the divine character and government was wholly loſt in the days of Chriſt and his apoſtles.

I cannot help thinking, by the way, that what time ſoever the worſhip of Jeſus Chriſt was introduced, and how erroneous ſoever it may appear in the eye of a Rational Diſſenter, if an error, it is an error divinely inſtituted. I ſincerely beg that you would favour me with an expoſition of Heb. i. 6. *When he bringeth in the firſt begotten into the world, he ſaith let all the angels of God worſhip him.* And alſo John v. 23. *That all men ſhould honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath ſent him.*

By the firſt-begotten in the one text, I apprehend he who is called the Son in the other is intended. If ſo, it is clear to a demonſtration, that he is to be honoured by all the angels of God, and by all the deſcendants of Adam; and as for the nature of that worſhip or honour that is to be given to him, we are told that it is ſuch as we ought to pay to the Father. In order to deter us from undervaluing him as a man, by conſidering him as being ſuch a one as ourſelves, and to excite us to honour him even as we honour the Father, we are told that the Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son, and that the Father accepteth of no honour but where the Son is included, "*He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father who ſent him.*" Now, Sir, if all the angels of God are commanded to worſhip the firſt-begot-

ten

ten, and if all men ought to honour the Son even as they honour the Father, muſt not the Rational Diſſenters be very abſurd and impious in conſidering him as only a man like themſelves? If all judgment is committed unto the Son, will there not be ſome danger, think you, of his reſenting the conduct of thoſe who undervalue him even as a man, let their pretenſions to ſuperior reaſon be ever ſo lofty?

I ſuppoſe you will think, Sir, that, there is orthodoxy ſufficient in what I have already written in this letter to make the exerciſe of reading it at one ſitting abundantly ſevere. I ſhall therefore conclude for this time, ſubſcribing myſelf,

Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant,

LETTER V.

INDEED Doctor! Is it ſo, that the Rational Diſſenters are apt to undervalue Jeſus Chriſt even as a man? and is this the Rational Chriſtianity that boaſts its own excellency above all that is called Orthodox? I verily think, indeed, that having got the only begotten of the Father, brought down to a level with themſelves, they might in point of good manners have uſed him with common decency, and not have undervalued him as you tell us has been their practice. With me this is no proof of their ſuperlative reaſon I aſſure you. Do not you think, Sir, in this that they follow the example of Jews and Mahomedans, who alſo undervalue him as a man, and who alſo are virtuous and rational in their own way? One would really be tempted to think that the people with whom you are converſant are remarkable for nothing ſo much, as their diſſenting from Jeſus Chriſt as an object of divine adoration. Either you greatly bely them, Doctor, or they muſt be the moſt impious and irrational race of beings on this ſide of the Helleſpont.

" *Upon finding, that, inſtead of being very God of very God, the Creator of heaven and earth, he is only a man like ourſelves, we are apt at firſt to undervalue him, and not to conſider him in that diſtinguiſhed light, in which though a man he is every*

every where repreſented †." By which it appears that the firſt impreſſion your Rational religion makes upon your minds is, to influence you to undervalue the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, inſtead of worſhipping him, even as you worſhip the Father. Some would be apt to conclude from hence, that Rational religion has very few advantages over ſcriptural religion which influences us to embrace and adore the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, according to the import of his great name IMMANUEL. If your Rational Diſſenters undervalue the Lord Jeſus with impunity, do you think, Doctor, that we ſhall be damned for rejoicing in him as the ſeed of David after the fleſh, and at the ſame time adoring him as God over all bleſſed for evermore? If we ſhould indeed be ſo unhappy, we ſhall have cauſe to execrate the names of thoſe prophets and apoſtles who have by their doctrines ſo grievouſly miſled us. But if it ſhould in the end appear that the Redeemer's perſon is anſwerable to his adorable name IMMANUEL, think ſeriouſly, Sir, how they will be likely to fare who undervalue him, even as a man? Will it not be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for ſuch? Although they lift themſelves up to heaven in pride and ſelf-conceit, will they not be in danger of being caſt down into hell, in a way of juſt condemnation for their having undervalued him, whom the Father delighteth to honour, and whom he hath commanded all men to worſhip, even as they worſhip himſelf? Theſe things deſerve a very ſerious conſideration, Doctor: may you and I both conſider them aright!

† Prel. Diſc. pag. 31.

By the way, it is pretty plain, and I am glad to ſee it, that ſo illuſtrious is this truth of Chriſt's proper and perſonal deity, that God draweth teſtimonies to it from the mouths and pens, even of thoſe who are its moſt avowed enemies. Pagans, ere now, have borne teſtimony to the miſſion of Jeſus; and the hardened Jewiſh high prieſt bore witneſs to the redemption of mankind. I am perſuaded, it would appear ſomething remarkable if we ſhould find the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley like the Jewiſh high prieſt, unknown to himſelf, teſtifying the true and proper deity of the Son of God; yet even this is far from being impoſſible. Give me leave, Sir, to try what may be done in this way: for really I think it not only practicable, but eaſy.

1. After correcting that irreverence of your friends towards the Lord Jeſus Chriſt, which the firſt impreſſions of Rational religion are apt to influence them to, you are pleaſed to ſet before them a ſketch of what you take to be the dignity of his perſon, amongſt which, I find it declared of Jeſus, "*that he has communications with God, and ſpeaks and acts from God in ſuch a manner as no other man ever did* †." You know, Sir, that the patriarchs and prophets, eſpecially the latter, had communications with God ſo far, as to know and reveal his mind to mankind; what they ſpake and acted from God, was perfectly right, and acceptable in his ſight, inſomuch that their doctrine is to this day as authentic as the doctrine of Chriſt himſelf. You ſay that Jeſus has communications with God which they never had, which ſeems to imply a ſpecial union between God

† Prelim. Diſ. page 31.

and

and him, ſuch as they never enjoyed, nor pretended to. As to the preciſe definition of this union, he muſt be precipitate who dares undertake it; but that there is ſome ſuch undeſcribable union ſubſiſts, your own doctrine apparently ſuppoſes. I really believe that we ſhould have had comparatively but few objectors to the proper deity of the bleſſed Saviour, could our divines have conſidered the union of God and man in the perſon of Jeſus Chriſt, as a thing to us incomprehenſible, and left it juſt as it is found in the ſcriptures, ~~without darkening and left it juſt as it is found in the ſcriptures~~, without darkening and perplexing the ſubject with their own bewildering and bold attempts to explain it. I am really glad to ſee that after all your militating againſt the true and proper deity of Chriſt, you cannot help ſuppoſing that he enjoys ſuch an union with God as none other can enjoy. According to the ſtated laws of philoſophy, there can be no communication without union; diſſolve the union, and communication inſtantly ceaſes. The communication which you ſay Jeſus has with God, neceſſarily ſuppoſes an union of Chriſt's humanity with true and proper deity, ſuch as is enjoyed by no other being whatever.

2. Speaking of Jeſus Chriſt as head over all things to his church, you have theſe very remarkable words, "*Who ſtill feels for, and will be preſent with his faithful diſciples and followers, even to the end of the world* †." Nothing can be more expreſſive of my ſentiments than this declaration; nothing can leſs countenance the vain and ignorant notion of the Rational Diſſenters "*that Chriſt is only a man like our-*

† Preliminary Diſcourſe, page 25.

ſelves."

ſelves." Yea, nothing can more fully prove the true and proper divinity of the Son of God than this teſtimony from Dr. Prieſtley. Indeed, Sir, you muſt give me leave to be thankful that the moſt holy God has by your pen confirmed me more and more in that, without which my hope muſt inevitably be cut off.

Give yourſelf a little time to reflect, and aſk your own heart how it is that one who is only a man like ourſelves can feel for his faithful diſciples in general, and be with them in all their trials; ſeeing he is removed, as ſuch from them to a diſtance immenſe and unſpeakable? A man like ourſelves, muſt be capable of being only in one place, at one and the ſame period. You and I cannot be, both at Leeds and in London at the ſame time; neither can Jeſus, if only like ourſelves, be at once both on earth and in heaven. That he is in heaven, and there muſt remain as man, till his ſecond coming, the apoſtle Paul bears witneſs; it will therefore lie upon Dr. Prieſtley to ſhew, how he can be preſent with his people in all their trials, even to the end of the world. If Jeſus continues in heaven till the reſtitution of all things, as Paul ſays, and yet be with his people in all their trials, as Dr. Prieſtley, ſays, and according to his own promiſe, he muſt be ſomething more than a man like ourſelves.

You know, Sir, that the faithful diſciples and followers of Jeſus may be exceedingly diſperſed in the world, and that therefore the perſon who is preſent with them in all places and upon all occaſions muſt needs be very extraordinary. For inſtance, they are ſcattered through Britain, and on the continent; in the Indies eaſt and weſt, in every quarter of the globe: therefore, how ſhall the man Jeſus be preſent with them

them all, in all places, at one and the ſame time, without a preſence univerſally diffuſive? Indeed, Sir, it will never impeach your wiſdom, either has a Chriſtian or a Diſſenter, to believe, that the being, who is preſent with all the heavenly hoſts, and at the ſame time is preſent with all his people upon earth, in what quarter ſoever, muſt be truly and properly God. I cannot tell how you will ſpeak of the omnipreſence of God, when you ſpeak thus of the preſence of Chriſt, whom you ſay is only a man. Really, Sir, I know no body who can anſwer your writings to better purpoſe than yourſelf. I blame both Mr. Venn and the Proteſtant Diſſenter for not giving you the honour ſo juſtly merited.

3. It might well be thought an unpardonable neglect, if I was to take no further notice of that wonderful paſſage, in page 6, of the Preliminary Diſcourſe. "*Having got this hypotheſis* (namely, that Chriſt was a pre-exiſtent being) *they were eaſily led into a miſtaken interpretation of ſome paſſages of the Old Teſtament, and ſuppoſed, that when God is there ſaid to have created the world by his word* (λογῳ), *another agent was meant, and not the meer power and energy of God himſelf: though the apoſtle John ſeems to have intended expreſsly to contradict and refute that notion, by aſſerting, in the introduction to his goſpel, that what is called* λογος *or the word, was God himſelf, and not a being diſtinct from him.*" How far ſome texts in the Old Teſtament have been underſtood or miſunderſtood, is not the object of my preſent enquiry; though it is obſervable enough, that the inſpired apoſtle Paul, as well as his brethren, ſets forth the exiſtence of Jeſus antecedent to his incarnation. All that I aim to take notice of here is, the aſſertion of

John, that "*what is called the word is God himſelf.*" It is what I by no means deny, though I cannot help wondering to ſee the text cited by one who takes Jeſus to be only a man like ourſelves. Surely no man was ever more miſtaken as to the meaning of a text of ſcripture, than you are with regard to this, nor leſs apprehenſive of the juſt conſequences of ſuch an injudicious quotation. This text you have cited with a view to prove that Jeſus Chriſt had no exiſtence prior to his coming in the fleſh: but, to the entire overthrow of the Rational ſcheme, it eſtabliſhes as a rock, the doctrine of the true and proper deity of JESUS JEHOVAH. Admitting that there was no ſuper-angelic ſpirit employed in the work of creation and providence, but that God himſelf, by his own proper energy, brought all things into being, and, by the ſame energetic influence ſupports all things, and that what is called the word is God himſelf, and not a being diſtinct from him; what advantage will this be to the Rational ſcheme, ſeeing the ſame who is called the word, and whom you ſay from John, is God himſelf, is as expreſsly ſaid to have been made fleſh and to have dwelt amongſt us? To ſet the matter in a clear point of view, it will be proper to recite the paſſage, chap. i. ver. 1, 2, 3, 14. *In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. The ſame was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. The* WORD *was made fleſh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.* I beg leave to preſent you with a paraphraſe on the words, according to your ſenſe of them; and then we

ſhall

ſhall ſee how far they will ſupport your account of Jeſus Chriſt, as being only a man like yourſelf. *In the beginning was God, and God was with God, and God was God himſelf, the ſame was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him and without him was not any thing made that was made. And God was made fleſh, and dwelt among (us and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth.* Now, Doctor, this is the fair reading of the words according to your notion; and, had not you told us that you are a Rational Chriſtian, any body would have taken you for one of the worſt kind of Athanaſians, if not a downright Tritheiſt. But, it is not my purpoſe at preſent to bring further proof upon this head; contenting myſelf with your own authority for my believing in the proper deity of my bleſſed Redeemer.

The *word* was God himſelf, ſay you, and ſo ſays John the evangeliſt; who further ſays, that *the word was made fleſh, and dwelt among us, &c.* That is, God himſelf was made fleſh and dwelt among us. Now, Sir, I ſhould like to know when, or how God himſelf was made fleſh, and dwelt among us, if he was not manifeſted in the adorable perſon of Jeſus of Nazareth? I think indeed that hiſtory furniſheth not with any account of human nature ſince the fall of Adam, ſo fit as was his for deity to inhabit. You help me to account for ſome paſſages of holy writ which Rational Chriſtians ſeldom meddle with, ſuch as "*in Jeſus dwelleth all the fullneſs of the Godhead bodily*," which muſt be the caſe you know if the word is God himſelf, and that God himſelf was made fleſh. "*His name ſhall be called Immanuel, which is, God with us.*" Literally fulfilled when God himſelf was made

fleſh,

fleſh, and dwelt among us in our own very nature. This was God manifeſt in the fleſh whom the apoſtle Paul ſpeaks of, and which he calls the great myſtery of godlineſs. In this view of the ſubject, Jeſus is juſtified when in the Apocalypſe he aſſumes the name of Alpha and Omega, which aſſumption could never be juſtified on ſuppoſition that he had no exiſtence prior to his being born of the virgin.

Indeed, Doctor, thoſe people whom you ſtile Orthodox are more obliged to you than you were aware of, and henceforward will be apt to expect advantages to their ſyſtem from your pen, either deſignedly or undeſignedly.

However, I would not have you or any body elſe ſuppoſe that I have entered here into a defence of Chriſt's proper divinity; that was by no means my view. All I aimed at was to point out to my reader how far you yourſelf have defended it, even when you fancied yourſelf to be writing againſt it; no judgment therefore is to be formed, by what is here written of my ſentiments concerning the perſon of Jeſus, any further than, that I am an hearty advocate for his real divinity: an article of faith, which I ſhould be glad to diſcuſs with the reverend Doctor Prieſtley, or any of his friends, who may happen to be at leiſure.

Upon the whole, Sir, I could almoſt perſuade myſelf, if it were poſſible, that it is not the doctrine of Chriſt's divinity itſelf that vexes you, ſo much as the people who maintain it, and perhaps you may have reaſons for your prejudice againſt them, which I am unacquainted with: but really, it does not become a generous mind to retain prejudice againſt any of our fellow creatures. I intend not any thing upon this ſubject at preſent farther than aſſuring you

that

that I think the Rational ſcheme will require a much better and more conſiſtent defence reſpecting Chriſt's being only a man like ourſelves, before it will be likely to gain many proſelytes out of the Orthodox tribes.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant,

LETTER

LETTER VI.

Reverend Sir,

IT is far from my deſign to miſrepreſent your meaning, or to make uſe of unworthy cavils, in order to render you odious to your fellow Chriſtians: neither would I willingly err in the leaſt, in point of fairneſs, as you think your other antagoniſts have done; but you muſt give me leave to ſay that you have written many things without any meaning at all, unleſs indeed you intended to vindicate the doctrine of atonement ſo long exploded by Rational Chriſtians. That the latter was the caſe, will not eaſily be believed; and therefore, I ſhall admit the former, and ſhall ſhew from good and authentic records, that it is even poſſible for a Rational man to write without any meaning. "*When the mind has been tinctured,*" ſays my author *, *with any falſe notions of God, it is hardly poſſible that they ſhould ever be practically rectified; becauſe the ſame names will continue to ſuggeſt the ſame ideas, and to excite the ſame feelings, whatever reaſon may dictate to the contrary.*" I think it is pretty plain that thoſe many, who you ſay, talk of God like Arminius or Socinus, and think of him much like Auſtin and Calvin, can have no meaning in

* Preliminary Diſcourſe, page 19.

what

what they say, seeing their words are a contradiction to the dictates of reason within them. Dr. Priestley also informs us, that formerly he had his mind tinctured with those unworthy notions of God, commonly called Orthodoxy; therefore it is impossible that they should ever be practically rectified. This may serve as an apology with the Rational Dissenters for the many Orthodox sayings gleanable in the extensive fields of his productions, of which it may be said that they spring up in as little time as mushrooms; whether those of them that are upon divine subjects are likely to be of longer duration, I cannot certainly determine. However, the dictates of the Doctor's reason being diametrically opposite to every sentiment of Orthodoxy; it follows, reader, that wherever you meet with an Orthodox sentence in Dr. Priestley's works, you need not be offended with it, for it is only the influence which the former tincture of his mind has upon him, and in reality the author meant nothing by it.

It is indeed my opinion that many of your sayings, respecting the sufferings of Christ, are very orthodox, and some of them even strictly Calvinistic. Surely it will be the wonder of the age if you should at last come over to the Calvinists. Really, Doctor, I do not despair of your conversion; for I think it not impossible, notwithstanding all that the Rev. Mr. Venn and the Protestant Dissenter have pleaded to the contrary. Should I prove you a Calvinist, and expose you to the persecutions of your Rational brethren, what would you say, Sir? Would not you allow me to have some pretensions to reason myself, although numbered even amongst the Orthodox?

But,

But, before I proceed farther upon this head, give me leave to obſerve, that I am as great an enemy as you can be, to the burning of bodies for hereſy; that is, putting people to death for the glory of God, and the good of the church; and have the murder of Servetus in equal abhorrence with yourſelf, notwithſtanding Calvin was therein an accomplice. Nevertheleſs, when I conſider that all the enemies of Calvin's doctrine, who have written from Bellarmine down to Dr. Prieſtley, have carefully recorded this inſtance, and induſtriouſly held him up to public infamy for it, it convinces me that Mr. Calvin muſt have been a man of the moſt irreproachable conduct and ſpirit in every other part of his life, ſeeing his avowed enemies have been able to find nothing elſe againſt him but that infamous act, of his conſenting to the death of miſtaken Servetus, ſo that the very reproaches of his enemies ſerve only to embelliſh his character and to advance his reputation. I am not certain whether Dr. Prieſtley, of Leeds, would give his conſent to the burning of Orthodox Diſſenters at a ſtake for their bigotry; but if we may give credit to his own teſtimony, he is very willing that they ſhould burn in hell fire for their orthodoxy; for he is fully perſuaded, that Jeſus Chriſt will do by them, juſt as he did by the phariſees in his time; the children of the kingdom, who were caſt out into utter darkneſs, where is weeping and wailing and gnaſhing of teeth. After ſuch an expreſſion of your charity, really, Sir, your cenſure of John Calvin hath not the moſt favourable appearance. Moſt people will be apt to conclude, that your ſpirit poſſeſſeth a degree of rancour, at leaſt not infe-

rior to that ſpirit which perſecuted Michael Servetus; but it is well for the Orthodox Diſſenters that there is a great difference between Calvin's influence and that of the Rev. Doctor Prieſtley. I might indeed aſk you if thoſe who are now called Orthodox are the only people who have had the honour of burning heretics, and whether the Arians themſelves, in the days of their Orthodoxy, did not ſee the ſame neceſſity of glorifying God by deſtroying thoſe who differed from them. Indeed, Sir, there are few ſects among us who have not a lawful claim to the honour of having murdered their brethren for the good of the cauſe: and I am very much miſtaken, if even in our own days, we could not be furniſhed with divines who would very willingly take this method of reclaiming the refractory, were they but bleſſed with a government favourable for ſuch a purpoſe.

But, leaving the ſhocking ſcenes of pious murder, I ſhall give due attention to your doctrine of atonement, as I find it ſcattered in your prolific pages: and I rejoice to ſee it forcing its evidence through the labours of the moſt ſtrenuous oppoſition, and making even Dr. Prieſtley himſelf act in ſubſervience to the great deſigns of truth. The firſt paſſage I ſhall quote relates to the miſſion of Jeſus, ſhews to what end he was ſent into the world, and is found page 20, of your Conſiderations of Differences of Opinion. "*A ſenſe of our obligation to our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, alſo as a perſon commiſſioned from God to redeem, that is, to deliver, ſave, or reſcue us from a ſtate of ſin and miſery.*" Now, Sir, whatever meaning you had, or whether you really have any meaning at all in theſe words, you muſt not be offended if I take

take the ſentence according to its grammatical conſtruction, and apply it to the purpoſe in view. The phraſeology is truly Calviniſtic, and Calvin himſelf could not better have expreſt his own meaning than you do, even when you are labouring to root out Calviniſm from the face of the earth. I am afraid, Doctor, that the Rational Diſſenters will compare you to David Simple's brown-cow, which having given a good pailful of milk, kicked it down with her foot. It is true you have laboured to ſoften that inflexible word (*redeem*); but in fact it will appear that your explanation has but very little promoted the intereſts of Rational religion. Has really befriended what you call Orthodoxy, and not overturned it as you humbly expected.

"*To redeem us from a ſtate of ſin and miſery,*" is the text, "*To deliver, ſave, or reſcue us from a ſtate of ſin and miſery,*" is your commentary upon it. Give me leave to comment on your commentary, before I meddle with the text. And I aſſure you, I do not illuſtrate it by my own authority only, but bring along with me the authority of Samuel Johnſon, A. M. in his almoſt unliftable Dictionary, whoſe teſtimony as a Dictionary-maker, is generally held to be good and authentic. He tells me that to deliver, is to ſave or reſcue, ſo that we have here no leſs than three words given in order to make clear the ſenſe of one. Would not theſe three words, heaped thus together, ſeem to convey the idea of ſome great and imminent danger to which the parties, thus to be delivered, ſaved or reſcued, ſtood expoſed? Alſo, does not the idea of ſomething very great and hazardous in the undertaking of him who was thus commiſſioned to deliver, ſave, or reſcue, ſuggeſt itſelf from them. In order to deliver, ſave or reſcue us from a ſtate

of

of ſin and miſery, muſt not what he did who was thus commiſſioned, be in ſome way or other accounted to us, and rendered available by ſome kind of application. But ought we not in explaining a word or ſentence to come up as near as poſſibly we can to its real ſenſe, if we are not able fully to expreſs it? This you avoided in the preſent caſe: notwithſtanding your gloſs upon the word (redeem) expreſſes much more than is favourable to the Rational ſcheme. Permit me to review the word redeem in its common acceptation, and conſider the Saviour's commiſſion accordingly; that I may thereby teach you either to become Orthodox yourſelf, or leave our phraſes to our own proper uſe.

1. To redeem. To ranſom; to relieve by paying a price.

2. To redeem. To make atonement.

3. To redeem. To ſave the world from the curſe due to ſin.

4. To redeem. To reſcue, to recover.

You tell us that Jeſus was commiſſioned by God to redeem us; we ſee that to redeem, was to ranſom us, by paying the price of our redemption. What that price was, by which he ranſomed us, you are pleaſed to ſhew in theſe precious words: "*Who loved us and freely gave himſelf to death for us* *." So that if we admit Dr. Prieſtley to be his own expoſitor, the doctrine will be thus defined. Jeſus Chriſt is a perſon commiſſioned of God to ranſom us, by giving himſelf to death as the price of our redemption. This is ſound divinity, Sir; good Orthodox Calviniſm. If ſome certain gentlemen, now dwelling in the houſe appointed for all living, were to lift up their heads from under

* Preliminary Diſcourſe, page 24.

the turf and review your writings, they would undoubtedly blame you for betraying the cauſe of Rational religion, by inadvertently blending your writings with ſo many Orthodox phraſes, provided they have not departed from their former ſentiments. But to the matter in hand; you tell us that Jeſus Chriſt is a perſon commiſſioned by God to redeem us. To redeem us is to make an atonement for us. Paul the apoſtle tells us, that this was made by the ſacrifice of himſelf, whereby he for ever perfected all who are ſanctified, which is confirmed by your aſſertion that he loved us and gave himſelf to death for us. Giving himſelf to death for us was certainly what the apoſtle meant by the ſacrifice of himſelf. Sacrifices were ordained to make an atonement for ſin; the Redeemer therefore gave himſelf as a ſacrifice for us, that he might atone for the ſin which we had committed, as you very juſtly obſerve, by putting the following words into Chriſt's mouth, alluding to the legal ſacrifices, page 2, of your Additional Remarks, &c. "*My blood may be ſaid to be ſhed for the remiſſion of ſins*," which muſt be, becauſe it is atoning blood, and hath procured this remiſſion or pardon. Good Calviniſm again, Sir. You tell us that Chriſt was commiſſioned of God to redeem us, "we find that this redemption is ſaid to be, to deliver the world from the curſe due to ſin;" and if we want to know how this was done, the apoſtle tells us that *he delivered us from the curſe of the law by being made a curſe for us*. Here was the innocent becoming a curſe for the guilty; a doctrine which your reaſon ſtrongly remonſtrates againſt, but which your pen very agreeably eſtabliſhes, Doctor. It was certainly very unhappy for Rational religion that your mind was ſo ſtrongly tinctured with

with Orthodoxy in your younger days; for as you juſtly obſerve, it is impoſſible that ever it ſhould be practically rectified. Mortal man could hardly do more to rectify it than you have done; and yet, in ſpite of yourſelf, Orthodoxy will break out in your compoſitions.

To redeem, is to reſcue or recover, as you ſay, which is very expreſſive of the work of the Redeemer upon the redeemed; by his bringing us out of darkneſs into marvellous light, and from the power of Satan to the living God. Well may we then, as you adviſe us, "*entertain in our minds a very high idea of the benefits accruing to us by his life and death* *;" good experimental divinity indeed! divinity worthy your moſt ſerious conſideration. This is the very thing that the Independents require in order to communion with them; and which you ſay there is not a ſhadow of ground for in the New Teſtament. Whether there is the ſhadow of ground for it in the New Teſtament † or not, I have ſhewn that there is the ſubſtance of ground for it in Dr. Prieſtley's own writings.

Give me leave to correct a ſmall inaccuracy in that otherwiſe beautiful paſſage of yours, "*who loved us and freely gave himſelf to death for us, to redeem us from ſin and miſery; that we might become partakers of the ſame love of God with him; and be joint heirs of the ſame glory and happineſs* §; notwithſtanding you conſider the Son of God to be only a man like yourſelf; yet, even as a man like yourſelf, you ought to have treated him with common civility, and not have given him the lie as in the paſſage under conſi-

* Conſiderations on the Lord's Supper, page 57.
† Addreſs on Church Diſcipline, page 34.
§ Preliminary Diſcourſe, page 24.

deration. Chriſt himſelf tells us, " *that* GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD *that he gave his only begotten Son that whoſoever believeth in him ſhould not periſh, but have everlaſting life* *. Here the love of God is repreſented as ſovereign, and ſpontaneous, the ſole cauſe of the gift of Chriſt. This you deny, and alledge that the gift of Chriſt is the cauſe why we are beloved of God. " *He gave himſelf, that we might become partakers of the love of God,*" ſay you; ſuppoſing, that the world of mankind were not partakers of the love of God, till Chriſt had given himſelf to redeem us and procure this love for us. Do not Doctor be offended at thoſe who talk of purchaſed pardon, ſeeing, according to the obvious ſenſe of your own words, the very love itſelf which pardons the ſinner, is purchaſed or procured by the death of Jeſus. But the truth is, the love which God bore to mankind was the cauſe of Chriſt's being at all given; the end to which Chriſt was given, was, that as many as believe in him ſhould be brought to poſſeſs the bleſſings of this loving kindneſs.

In your firſt query to the Proteſtant Diſſenter, you twice mention, in the very language of Calviniſm, " *what Chriſt has done and ſuffered for us.*" How could what he did, be done for us if it was not done in our ſtead? Or how could he with any propriety be ſaid to have ſuffered for us, if the pain which he endured was not the proper puniſhment of our ſin and rebellion? He could neither do nor ſuffer for us, without ſtanding in our place; if he did ſo, then he was the ſinner's ſubſtitute to all intents and purpoſes. How can you then, Sir, conſiſtent with yourſelf, blame thoſe who believe

* John xiii. 16.

that the innocent Jeſus died for guilty man? This Calviniſtical Doctrine of vicarious puniſhment you thus ſet forth in page 30 of Additional Conſideration, &c. "*When we do anything in remembrance of Chriſt, we do it to take occaſion to recollect what Chriſt has done and ſuffered* for us *in order to accompliſh the gracious ſcheme of our ſalvation, or our deliverance from ſin and miſery. Our Lord alſo calls the bread his body, and the wine his blood apparently with a few to our recollecting in a more eſpecial manner the laſt and moſt perfect inſtance of his love, in giving his body to be crucified, and his blood to be ſhed* for us." Again in page 32, "*this cup is the New Teſtament in my blood, appears to me to have been added, in order to expreſs on what account we are to remember him, viz. as having by his death accompliſhed the ſcheme of our ſalvation.*" Very pretty divinity indeed! paſſable enough, even with the Orthodox; all tending to ſet forth the plenary ſatisfaction made by Chriſt for the ſins of thoſe who ſhall believe in him.

I am, Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER VII.

Reverend Sir,

AS you have been pleaſed to ſignify the high and good opinion which you have conceived of your own attainments in your letter to Mr. Venn, pag. 79. where you tell us that "*Having experienced an almoſt entire revolution in your own religious ſentiments, you find your heart better, and your head clearer in conſequence of it,* &c." I ſhould have expected that the doctrine of election and reprobation would have had no countenance in your performances. It is but juſt to believe that you would not willingly promote a doctrine, which your clear reaſon ſo ſtrongly remonſtrates againſt, any more than the Rev. Mr. John Weſley, A. M. ſometime fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford; who in the depth of his humility and ſelf-diffidence is pleaſed to ſtile that ſame doctrine "THE HORRIBLE DECREE." It would ſeem that this reverend gentleman in the younger part of life had made an excurſion down to hell, like the heroes of ancient fable, where he had an opportunity of hearing the cries of the damned and of being informed by them of the horribleneſs of this decree; which account he thought proper to communicate to the world as ſoon as he got ſafe upon earth again. This performance was

an

an unſacred hymn upon the horrible decree. Yet after all the clearneſs of his head, he has been unable to reſtrain himſelf in his future publications from giving many bold ſtrokes in favour of this ſame decree of election; for the Rev. Mr. Weſley has not yet learned to be *perfectly* conſiſtent with himſelf, any more than Dr. Prieſtley and myſelf. Were I to ſtudy to put you out of conceit with the goodneſs of your heart, Sir, I ſhould very likely have little thanks for my trouble; but if Solomon were here, he would tell you that the man who truſts in his own heart is a fool. And really, Doctor, you have not given the Orthodox Diſſenters any proof of its ſuperlative goodneſs. Give me leave to tell you that, I am of opinion there is a great deal of room for your heart to grow better and your head to grow clearer ſtill, on ſuppoſition that any thing can be gathered of the ſtate of either, by your lucubrations. Between you and I, it is not thought very adviſeable to put too much truſt in the heart of man, or to lean much to human underſtanding. Some people will not ſcruple to alledge that *the heart of man is deceitful above all things and deſperately wicked, even beyond the knowledge of its owner.* This they will aſſign as a reaſon why ſome flatter themſelves that *they are rich and increaſed with goods and have need of nothing, even when they are wretched, miſerable, blind, and naked.* Indeed, Sir, as you ſay of the Orthodox Diſſenters, I may ſay to you; it would have been more eligible, and abundantly more for your honour, to have left it to me to publiſh the goodneſs of your heart, and the clearneſs of your head, than to have taken that trouble upon yourſelf, which muſt needs have been very mortifying to ſuch modeſty as yours. How-

ever it is pretty plain, that the fruits of your converſion to the Rational ſcheme, have not been ſo conſpicuous to others, as to yourſelf; as nothing but their want of diſcernment could have put you under the diſagreeable neceſſity of ſounding your own praiſe, in imitation of the phariſees and their deſcendants.

I hope, Sir, that your goodneſs will pardon the unhappy way that I have got of departing on a ſudden from the ſubject propoſed, and bear with my freedom while I enquire after the meaning of that paſſage, page 4. of your Eſſay on Church Diſcipline, "*The general promulgation of the goſpel of Chriſt, was intended to procure him, from all nations promiſcuouſly, a peculiar people zealous of good works.*" I take it to be the very language of the Orthodox, and what the ſtricteſt Calviniſt will by no means object to. When you aſſert that the promulgation of the goſpel was intended to anſwer this important purpoſe; I would ſuppoſe you mean that it was intended by God himſelf. Might not I aſk you if you do not think an intention in the infinite mind, in all reſpects equivalent to a decree? ſeeing he is of one mind and none can turn him, nor render abortive his grand deſigns. It will then appear that God had decreed that Chriſt ſhould have a peculiar people zealous of good works, to be gathered by the preaching of the goſpel out from all nations promiſcuouſly. This you can have no objection to, and for my part I have none, therefore ſo far we are agreed. This decree or intention of the moſt High being admitted, it follows that the people to be procured are ſaid to be a peculiar people; as ſuch it behoves us to enquire into their character. On enquiry we ſhall find that this peculiar people, are ſuch whom the Redeemer appropriates to himſelf

himſelf as his own ſpecial property, upon whom no other power whatever has any juſt or lawful claim, and with whom he deals as he does not with the world, or the nations from whom you ſay they are procured by the goſpel. Theſe I take to be the people whom the apoſtle calls the fulneſs and body of Chriſt. So then it is apparent from your doctrine that the moſt High intended that Chriſt ſhould have a people appropriated to himſelf, and this people to be procured to him *from* the nations of the whole world. This procuring of a people for himſelf *from* all nations promiſcuouſly, naturally ſuppoſeth that the nations themſelves from which they are procured are not intended to be Chriſt's peculiar people, therefore not procured by the promulgation of the goſpel. Very good Calviniſm! Good old Orthodox doctrine neighbour!

I am not rightly ſatisfied Doctor with your free manner of talking about what you call experience, while you blame others for the very ſame thing. You tell us that you have experienced an almoſt entire revolution of your religious ſentiments. Pray, Sir, why may not they have experienced the ſame? Have not they an equal right with yourſelf to embrace the truth upon conviction? You ſay that you have experienced your head to be got clearer and your heart better upon this experimental revolution of your religious ſentiments; and as the Orthodox, eſpecially the Independents, have embraced a ſet of ſentiments diametrically oppoſite to yours, why ſhould you be affronted at them becauſe they experience the very reverſe of your feelings, and inſtead of their heads becoming clearer and their hearts better by the revolution in their religious ſentiment, they become daily more acquainted with the deceitfulneſs of their

hearts

hearts and the inſufficiency of their heads. You know, Sir, that our leading principle is, that every ſet of religious ſentiments muſt produce effects upon the mind ſuitable to itſelf. You cannot therefore expect, Doctor, that your ſet of religious ſentiments and mine can produce the very ſame effects upon the mind, ſeeing they are as oppoſite as light and darkneſs. But let my ſet of religious ſentiments produce what effects it may, my experience of theſe ſentiments and their effects muſt be as real as your own; and I may be as ſenſible of the badneſs and ſinfulneſs of my heart, as you are of the virtue and goodneſs of yours. Beſides, you take the liberty to publiſh your experience to the whole world, if they will take the trouble of reading it; and why may not a member of an Independent church publiſh his experience to the community he intends to aſſociate with? Indeed, Doctor, it is neither very generous nor rational to deny your neighbours the ſame liberty which you are pleaſed to take to yourſelf.

Moreover, you tell us that "*the Independents require alſo ſuch an account of what they call experiences in religion as there is not a ſhadow of ground for in the New Teſtament, and which few but enthuſiaſts will pretend to.*" You are by far too dogmatical, Doctor, you muſt ſtrive to break yourſelf of that impolite poſitive way of ſpeaking you have got; unleſs you intend to make the world believe that you are not as yet perfectly purged from ſelf-conceit. Who theſe enthuſiaſts are, and what their pretenſions be, I am not a competent judge: but according to my way of thinking, no man can have a juſter title to that diſtinction, than the gentleman who, having undergone an entire revolution in his religious ſentiments, finds his heart better and

his

his head clearer upon the change, which you tell us has been your bleſſed experience.

In your Additional Obſervations on the Lord's Supper, pag. 36. you appeal "*to the* EXPERIENCE *of the moſt ſincere Chriſtian, if he has not found every devotional feeling as lively in the exerciſe of prayer, as in the act, or in conſequence of receiving the Lord's Supper.*" I really believe they have, Doctor; every whit as lively. But what amazes me is, to find a writer who exclaims againſt thoſe who talk of experience in religion as enthuſiaſts, ſhould himſelf talk of "*experience* and *devotional feelings*," as if the Rational Diſſenters had obtained the excluſive right of all devotional feelings to themſelves. What ſome people call experience, and others call enthuſiaſm, can hardly be better expreſſed than by your phraſe, "*devotional feelings.*" To repreſent this important ſubject in a ſtronger light, let us ſuppoſe for inſtance, that the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley approaches God in prayer, under a lively ſenſe of the vaſt revolution he has undergone in his religious ſentiments, and of the goodneſs of his heart and clearneſs of his head conſequent upon it; would not every devotional feeling exert itſelf in thankfulneſs to God, that he is not abſurd like the Orthodox Diſſenters, bigotted and angry like the Rev. Mr. Venn; unjuſt and unfair like the Proteſtant Diſſenter, and ignorant and weak like myſelf. This, you know, Sir, muſt be felt and experienced by you in a Rational way; and why may not the people, whom you call Orthodox, *i. e.* irrational have devotional feelings and experience in their own way, though different from yours? I cannot help thinking that the poor publican in the parable had, as real and lively an experience of his own wretchedneſs and ſin, as the gentle-

gentleman phariſee had of his devotional feelings, and of the goodneſs of his heart and clearneſs of his head. Each was experimental, in his own way; and the one had as good a right to lament his own ſinfulneſs, as the other had to proclaim his perſonal goodneſs.

This brings to my mind a ſaying of yours, Additional Obſervations on the Lord's Supper, pag. 28. "*If the righteous diſclaim their good works at the day of Judgemnt, can it be ſuppoſed that they will plead and proclaim them here?*" Really, Sir, I ſhould think not; and that makes me the more ſurpriſed to hear from you any thing at all about the goodneſs of heart and the clearneſs of head which you have experienced. To make uſe of your own words, "*It would be rather more decent for others to have perſuaded you to think ſo well of yourſelf, than that you ſhould firſt pay yourſelf that compliment.*"

I will inform you, Doctor, what kind of experiences the Independents require in order to admiſſion into their communion, and then we ſhall ſee whether there be any ſhadow of ground for it or not in the New Teſtament. They require that the candidate for communion ſhould experimentally know himſelf to be a loſt, undone, and periſhing ſinner; one who ſtands in need of an all-ſufficient and every way compleat Saviour, to redeem him from the wrath to come and to ſave him to the uttermoſt. That he ſhould have ſuch a ſenſe of his own helpleſſneſs as to know that he can do nothing, unleſs God is pleaſed to work in him both to will and to do. That he believe in Jeſus as the only, the all-ſufficient Saviour of loſt ſinners, and deſire to be found in him, waſhed in his blood and cloathed with his righteouſneſs and ſalvation. Such and only ſuch is the experience which

Indepen-

Independent churches require, and which Dr. Prieſtley ſays has not a ſhadow of ground in the New Teſtament. You muſt have forgotten yourſelf ſtrangely here, Sir, on ſuppoſition that you have ever read the 2d of the Acts of the Apoſtles. The apoſtle preached the ſufferings and death of Chriſt to the multitude; under his ſermon the three thouſand were pricked in their hearts with a ſenſe of their ſin and danger, as is apparent from their pathetic exclamation, *Men and brethren what muſt we do?* Peter preached the Saviour of ſinners to be believed in as the only way of life and ſalvation; they received the word gladly. It would ſeem that on believing in Jeſus their ſorrow was turned into joy; and all this was antecedent to their being admitted into the Chriſtian church. This is rather more than a bare ſhadow of a ground for the experiences which you ſay the Independents require. Your words in pag. 118. on Diſcipline, are very applicable to thoſe primitive Chriſtians who were "*taught wiſdom and virtue by theſe their feelings and experience,*" for they continued ſtedfaſt in the apoſtles doctrine without any revolution in their religious ſentiments; in their fellowſhip and in breaking of bread and in prayer, without loſing all manner of church order and diſcipline, as the Rational Diſſenters have done, according to your teſtimony. That ſame church at Jeruſalem, I remember would not receive the apoſtle Paul into their communion till they had an account of his experience, how far, and by what means he had learned Chriſt. Paul was no way backward to relate his experience on different occaſions, and yet I do not recollect that, at any time by ſo doing he proclaimed his own goodneſs, however much the goodneſs of God was made manifeſt in him.

Of

Of all the people that ever heard this apoſtle preach, little was ſaid by him about the goodneſs of his heart, or the clearneſs of his head; but he could talk very feelingly of the law in his members, which warred againſt the law in his mind; the fleſh that luſted againſt the ſpirit; the body of death which was ſtill upon him even after his converſion. I would adviſe you, Doctor, to make a cloſe compariſon between your experience and that of the apoſtle Paul, for his was certainly of the right kind, whatever yours or mine may be; and it is a matter of no ſmall importance whether we are right or wrong in this caſe, ſeeing death will caſt the dye and unalterably fix our ſtate forever in weal or woe unſpeakable. I might refer you to Lydia whoſe heart the Lord opened, to Jairus, the jailor, and many others, whoſe experience was much a-kin to what the Independents require of thoſe whom they chuſe to admit into their communion; but I think what has been ſaid ſufficient for the preſent, eſpecially if you will conſider it diſpaſſionately and without prejudice.

One thing more I muſt take notice of before I conclude, and that is a very odd phraſe of yours in pag. 36. of your Eſſ. on Diſc. "*It has pleaſed the Divine Being for good and obvious reaſons not to make the terms of ſalvation ſo very determinate, as that a man ſhall be able to pronounce with abſolute certainty concerning the future ſtate of himſelf or others while we are in this life.*" The obvious intent of this is to inſinuate, that the Independents take upon them to determine with abſolute certainty on the eternal ſtate of thoſe whom they admit into communion. Which juſt before you repreſent as a judging of the heart, and of a perſon's actual

fitneſs

fitneſs for heaven. This miſrepreſentation of the conduct of the Independents muſt unavoidably bear ſomewhat hard againſt, either the goodneſs of your heart, or the clearneſs of your head; goodneſs of heart will not permit us wrongfully to accuſe, but from certain cauſes we may have miſtaken views of the conduct of our neighbours. However our publication of thoſe miſtaken views will never be deemed by the public an inconteſtible proof of the deepeſt penetration and intelligence. A little to purge them from this ſcandal, give me leave to obſerve, that you tell us, the Independents require an account of the experience of the candidate. This account which the candidate gives is the ſubject of their examination, and upon it they determine whether or not it be conſiſtent with the ſcripture; but as to the ſincerity of the perſon, and the reality of his experience, they pretend to be no further judges of, than "what appears in the outward propriety and regularity of his behaviour." Will you upon cool reflection call this a taking upon them to determine with abſolute certainty on the future ſtate of the candidate? Seeing they do not even take upon them to determine on his preſent ſtate, but on the profeſſion which he makes, and of his conduct conſequent upon it.

This paſſage alſo injuriouſly inſinuates, that the Independents expect that candidates for communion ſhould be able to determine upon their own future ſtate, by being delivered from all doubts of their ſincerity and fears of final miſcarriage; which Dr. Prieſtley himſelf muſt needs know to be groundleſs, if he is in the leaſt acquainted with Independent church diſcipline. And one would ſuppoſe that he is perfectly

fectly informed in its nature, when he can ſo poſitively declare that it is better to be without diſcipline altogether, than to embrace the diſcipline of the Independents, pag. 40.

The TERMS *of ſalvation are not ſo determinate you ſay*, &c. What! Doctor, is ſalvation to be ſold, that we muſt talk of *terms?* I ſhould have taken the terms to be ſufficiently determinate, when the comprehenſive bleſſing is expreſsly ſaid to be without money and without price: yet if we muſt talk of buying and ſelling of ſalvation, let us keep to bible language. But ſuppoſing that we muſt come up to terms in order to obtain ſalvation, are not thoſe terms as yet determined? Not ſo determinate as to be the ground of a ſure and certain hope of a bleſſed immortality for thoſe who believe in Jeſus in a ſcripture ſenſe? So then Rational religion ſuppoſeth, that, the terms of ſalvation are as yet undetermined; and irrational or ſcriptural religion ſuppoſeth that he that believeth on the Son hath life, and he that believeth not on the Son ſhall not ſee life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Of theſe two commend me to the latter.

I am,

Reverend Sir,

Your humble Servant.

LETTER

LETTER VIII.

Reverend Sir,

I AM entirely of your opinion that "*knowingly to conceal the truth, is a crime of ſo heinous a nature, that I ſhould be very unwilling to impute it to any perſon whatever* †," and am ready to believe that you muſt have been witneſs to a great deal of diſſimulation, to the great grief of your own open and ingenuous ſpirit, before your candour would have ſuffered you to impute ſuch a grievous crime to the Rational Diſſenting miniſters, who you tell us, Eſſay on Diſcipline, pag. 55. "*entertaining ſentiments in religion different from thoſe of their people, and ſuch as their people would not have borne with, they endeavoured to keep them (i. e. their ſentiments) as much as poſſible out of view.*" This is doubtleſs a crime of ſo heinous a nature, that your thus publicly charging them with it, naturally ſuppoſeth your provocation has been great. Moreover your familiar acquaintance with them is attended with peculiar advantages, ſuch as no Orthodox writer can pretend to; being thereby led to the very ſpring of this their diſſimulation, which we now find to be "a fear of loſing their ſubſcribers ‡. "*In this ſituation of the ge-*

† Differences of Opinion, pag. 9.
‡ Eſſay on Diſcipline, pag. 47.

nerality of diſſenting miniſters they will neceſſarily feel themſelves reſtrained from doing their duty by the fear of giving offence, and of loſing the affections and contributions of their more conſiderable hearers. Are not your miniſters men, and men of like paſſions and intereſts with yourſelves?" A very candid and honeſt confeſſion indeed: Of the greateſt uſe in leading us into the ſcope and ultimate aim of the Rational Diſſenting miniſters, with whom it is apparent that the contribution of a conſiderable hearer is of more weight than the moſt Rational ſentiment, ſeeing rather than loſe the one they will diſguiſe the other. Do not you think, Sir, that people of leſs penetration than yourſelf may in ſome meaſure be juſtified in prefering an honeſt enthuſiaſt, who preaches to the extent of his knowledge and belief, to a Rational Diſſenter, who for fear of loſing the contributions of his hearers, keeps his own ſentiments as much as poſſible out of view? I really wonder that a gentleman of your known integrity and philoſophic turn of mind ſhould be perſuaded to aſſociate with ſuch an herd of diſſemblers; whom you and I have convicted of the moſt heinous crime of concealing the truth from their hearers for fear of loſing their ſubſcriptions.

This leads us to account for that contempt in which they are held by the people, who as you tell us, pag. 41. Eſſ. on Diſc. have "*in ſome ſocieties expreſsly forbidden the miniſters their houſes except they come by ſpecial invitation.* ‖" If this be your own particular caſe, indeed I pity you, Doctor; and I think your people are very

‖ The paſſage is thus. "*I am informed there are ſocieties among us in which the miniſters are expreſsly forbidden to viſit their hearers except by particular invitation.*"

much

much obliged to your ingenuity, in ſo gently covering their ſhame even when you rebuke their folly. This prohibition laid upon the Rational miniſters by their hearers, would naturally lead us to ſuppoſe that the converſation of the miniſters was too grave and ſerious for the taſte of their people, if you had not all along diſcovered ſuch diſguſt at grave and ſerious religion; for which they can by no means be blamed. We have therefore but one way left to account for it, and that is, by ſuppoſing that the people received but very little profit by the company of their miniſters; otherwiſe they never would have forbidden them their houſes. This ſeems very likely to be the caſe, as certainly a man who can conceal the truth in the pulpit, will make but little ſcruple of doing it in private. We have quite the advantage of you here, for it would be thought a very ſtrange thing among the Orthodox, if a miniſter was denied the liberty of eating a bit of pudding with any of his hearers whenever he was in the humour ſo to do. Yea more, Doctor, one of the principal complaints that you ſhall hear from the Orthodox againſt their miniſters, is, that *they do not viſit their people often enough*; which at leaſt ſhews that they are not tired of their company.

It would require uncommon talents indeed for a miniſter, how cautious ſoever he may be, ſo abſolutely to keep his real ſentiments out of view, but that they will peep from behind the curtain ſometimes; the devil himſelf, as ſome people ſay, is not ſuch an abſolute maſter of diſſimulation, but he is found out occaſionally. Well, this diſſimulation being detected, and the cauſe of it eaſily gueſſed at, it is no wonder that the Rational miniſters are held in ſuch contempt, " *that a word of admonition from them in*

the pulpit would give unpardonable offence †." Seeing while the miniſter is telling them of their ſins, they would be thinking of his diſſembling his ſentiments; and as it is natural for us to favour ourſelves moſt, they would be apt to conclude that his hypocriſy is altogether as heinous as their drunkenneſs and whoredom. To be ſure, Sir, a miniſter can never admoniſh with a becoming authority either in ther pulpit or out of it, whilſt it is in the power of the admoniſhed party to retort upon him, *phyſician heal thyſelf*; therefore the ſtricteſt integrity is neceſſary to that miniſter who would admoniſh profitably, let him be Orthodox or Rational. You tell us that, in many places the congregations of the moſt Rational miniſters are dwindled away to nothing, notwithſtanding the excellency of their compoſitions; and if you would know the reaſon of that, Sir, you may conſider that one grain of honeſt zeal is of more eſteem with the generality of hearers, than the greateſt ingenuity that can diſcover itſelf in ſermonical compoſitions. All are not judges of that Rational ingenuity which you ſo much applaud, but moſt people are intelligent enough to diſcern when the miniſter really aims at their everlaſting welfare and does what he can for its advancement. It is obſervable enough that, this dwindling away has always been moſt diſcernable, in thoſe congregations where the miniſter has been moſt remarkable for *keeping his ſentiments out of view*, and cautious *of admoniſhing for fear of loſing the affections and contributions of his moſt conſiderable hearers.* On the other hand it is equally obſervable that among the Orthodox

† Eſſ. on Diſc. pag. 41.

thoſe

thoſe miniſters are moſt loved and followed who are moſt faithful in reproving, and admoniſhing ſinners both when in the pulpit and out of it, without any regard had to what may, or may not be the conſequences of ſuch admonition. And thoſe places of worſhip are beſt filled where the miniſter warmly and zealouſly declareth the whole council of God ſo far as he himſelf has learned it. How can thoſe congregations proſper where they are entertained with a diſguiſed and deceitful miniſtry? For my own part I would rather chooſe to ſit under ſuch a miniſtry as that of tinker Bunyan or cobler Howe, where I ſhould be ſure to be ſincerely dealt with, than that of a learned, ingenious, Rational diſſenting miniſter, who ſtrives as much as poſſible to keep his ſentiments out of view. It muſt indeed be very mortifying to gentlemen who have engroſſed the whole of Rationality to themſelves to ſee the Orthodox miniſters loved, eſteemed, and followed whilſt they with all their pretenſions, "*are conſidered as perſons who are paid by their hearers for haranguing them once a week.*†" Contemptible, however, as this eſtimation of their miniſters is, it is certainly very juſt; and what they have

† In ſhort a Diſſenting miniſter among thoſe who are uſually called the *Rational Diſſenters* begins now to be conſidered as a perſon who is paid by his hearers for haranguing them once a week; and the people attend the place of divine worſhip if not from mere unthinking habit, with the ſame views with which they would attend the lectures of any other perſon from whom they expected inſtruction or entertainment. Eſſ. on Diſc. pag. 41.

If I underſtand this paſſage aright, the Doctor means that the people attend the weekly harangues of Rational miniſters with the ſame views with thoſe who attend the lectures on philoſophy by Mr. Ferguſon and other gentlemen for inſtruction; and the giddy multitude who gape at the entertaining lectures on heads by George Alexander Stevens.

brought upon themſelves by their ſilent connivances at ſin, and their concealment of truth from their hearers for fear of loſing their ſubſcriptions.

Young Samuel's meſſage from God to Eli the prieſt, concludes with a paſſage very applicable to the preſent caſe of the Rational Diſſenting miniſters, and which may be very inſtructive if attended to with ſeriouſneſs, "*for them that honour me I will honour; and them that deſpiſe me ſhall be lightly eſteemed.*" That the Rational Diſſenting miniſters are lightly eſteemed you and I have ſufficiently ſhewn; it is therefore not unworthy of themſelves to enquire into the reaſons why they are ſo lightly eſteemed even by their own people? To aſſiſt in this enquiry, be it obſerved, that here is an expreſs promiſe, that all who aim at the honour and glory of God ſhall be honoured by him, among his people; but they (the Rational Diſſenting miniſters) are deſpiſed among their people and are even forbidden their houſes, inſtead of being beloved, honoured and obeyed; which ſuppoſeth that they have been too much like the ſons of Eli, who ſought their own gratification and not the glory of God; for God who has promiſed is faithful and will not deny himſelf. Do not you think now, that if, inſtead of concealing their ſentiments, and ſhamefully conniving at the ſins of their people without daring to admoniſh them, the Rational Diſſenting miniſters had ſtudied to maintain conſciences void of offence towards God and man, by being faithful in reproving ſin wherever it was found, and honeſtly declaring the whole council of God as far as they knew it, that they would in all probability have been more reſpectable in the eyes of the very people, who, as things are, have forbidden them their houſes?

But having diſhonoured God he hath brought them into that contempt which you complain of. God hath ſaid, "*he that hath my word, let him ſpeak my word faithfully; for what is the chaff to the wheat ſaith the Lord?*" Jer. xxiii. 28. But inſtead of obeying, having got the word of the Lord, as they think, more perfectly than their neighbours, they conceal it in their hearts, and keep it as much as poſſible out of view for fear of loſing their moſt conſiderable ſubſcribers. This is a diſhonouring of God by preferring their own temporal emolument to the ſucceſs of that which they take to be the truth, and ſhews them to be lovers of the world more than of the word of God. The word of God chargeth expreſsly that we ſhall not ſuffer ſin to reſt upon a brother, but that we ſhall in any wiſe reprove him for it; but they admoniſh not, becauſe as you ſay, "*the leaſt hint of an admonition from the pulpit would give unpardonable offence.*" How is it poſſible, Doctor, that ſuch men ſhould be otherwiſe than lightly eſteemed? I aſſure you, Sir, if this account of the Rational miniſters had not come from one, who cannot be ſuſpected of doing them injuſtice, I could not have believed that ſuch a contemptible race of mere ſcholars exiſted among us. If a miniſter is faithful to the light he hath received, God will make him as a brazen wall and as an iron pillar among the people, who if they fight againſt him ſhall not prevail; but if he is afraid of loſing their contributions, the ſame God will confound him before them, and bring him into contempt. I really wiſh that you, Sir, and your brethren, might ſeriouſly and attentively conſider theſe things without prejudice: for if it ſhould in the end appear that you are now fighting againſt God, a retroſpective view of

your preſent conduct will then yield neither profit nor pleaſure. I hope you will bear with me, if I expreſs it as my opinion that you have not weighed the great and important truths of Chriſtianity with that impartiality, and attention which the nature of the ſubject required; but upon detecting ſome things which you took to be abſurd among the people called Orthodox, you have too precipitately fled abſolutely to the utmoſt limits of the oppoſite extreme. But remember this, Sir, that the middle path of judgment will be always found to lie between the two extremes; therefore to avoid what we take to be an error on one hand, we ought to be very careful leſt we plunge into a greater on the other, and ſo the remedy prove worſe than the diſeaſe.

Being informed, " *that with the generality of thoſe who are now called Preſbyterians in England, the whole government of the ſociety, with reſpect to morals, is in the hands of the miniſter,* *" that the Rational Preſbyterian miniſters " *found it neceſſary to diſſemble their ſentiments by keeping them as much as poſſible out of view becauſe their people would not have borne with them,* †" that they " *find themſelves reſtrained from doing their duty for fear of loſing the affections and contributions of their moſt conſiderable hearers,* ‡" ſo that they dare " *not give a word of admonition from the pulpit.* §" It is not at all marvellous that " *the very idea of ancient church diſcipline ſhould be loſt among you, and your ſyſtem be found ſo very imperfect,* ‖" that if " *it were poſſible for a primitive Chriſtian to ſee the order of your churches, he would hardly think there was the appearance of your profeſſing yourſelves Chriſtians,* ¶"

* Pag. 40. † Pag. 55. ‡ Pag. 47. § Pag. 42.
‖ Pag. 45. ¶ Pag. 41.

eſpecially

eſpecially "*as theſe who do not believe in Chriſtianity do almoſt every thing that ye do.**" After ſuch an humbling view of the effects of Rational religion in the entire loſs of church diſcipline among your friends, one would hardly have expected to hear you declare that "*in your opinion it is better to have no church diſcipline at all, than that of the Independents.*†" Yet even here it is much if you are perfectly agreed with yourſelf ſeeing you give it, elſewhere, as your opinion that "*it is better to have the power of diſcipline in the hands of the miniſter or any other body than to have no diſcipline at all.*" To this I ſhould however object unleſs it ſhould appear that the miniſter is a man of integrity, who dares openly avow the truth, and who will rather chooſe to loſe the affections and contributions even of his richeſt hearers than keep out of view any truth the knowledge of which may be uſeful to the ſouls of men.

To do evil with a deſign to promote the cauſe of truth, and to pull down the church of God with a view to build up the goſpel in its ſimplicity, is a conduct ſo abſurd that from your account of the Orthodox it could only be expected to be found in their tabernacles. But to hear the Rev. Dr. Prieſtley repreſent it as the conduct of Rational Diſſenting miniſters, is indeed aſtoniſhing! I think, Sir, that theſe ſame gentlemen muſt be Antinomians, ſeeing their conduct, according to your account of it, ſays, "*let us do evil, and good ſhall follow*, pag. 55. *Finding themſelves more particularly incommoded and embarraſſed with the extra duties of their office, they laid hold of every opportunity of aboliſhing them.*" Of all men, ſurely none ſo unfit to ſtir up

* Pag. 43. † Pag. 39.

others

others to the practice of Chriſtianity as thoſe gentlemen who laid hold on every opportunity of aboliſhing the duties of their own office, finding themſelves incommoded and embarraſſed by them; it is therefore natural to ſuppoſe that admonition from them muſt give unpardonable offence to every intelligent hearer, who had opportunity of ſeeing their own endeavours to aboliſh the extra duties of the paſtoral office. The abolition of the duties of their own office was not thought ſufficient for the promulgation of Rational religion, but every other office power within the Rational churches muſt be aboliſhed alſo, for we are told that as the miniſters found "*the bulk of the people, and eſpecially the church officers, who were generally the more ſerious and zealous of their members, continuing ſtrongly attached to the opinions in which they had been educated,* (i. e. Orthodox opinions) *the miniſters found themſelves greatly incommoded by them. — In this diſagreeable ſituation the miniſters purpoſely neglected to fill up vacancies in church offices, and were in general heartily glad when they becamely entirely extinct.* † " If this was not practical Antinomianiſm, certainly there is no ſuch thing in exiſtence. However, it does not ſeem to reflect the higheſt honour on theſe gentlemen, that they were oppoſed by the more ſerious and zealous of their congregation; nor diſhonour upon the Orthodox that the more ſerious and zealous ſhould be of that perſuaſion. If your authority is to be depended upon, Sir, as I think it may, it is very apparent that Rational religion obtained only, the younger and more irreligious part of the people for her votaries, whilſt the aged, the more zealous and ſeri-

† Page 54.

ous

ous continued ſtrongly attached to the Orthodox doctrine; if ſo, I cannot think that your new religion has any reaſon to boaſt of her ſuperior excellence; unleſs it could indeed be proved that inconſiderate youth is more capable of the right uſe of reaſon, and forming a true judgment of divine things than mature age and manhood. Beſides it does not ſeem to argue much in favour of Rational miniſters, that they ſhould be ſo heartily glad of the extinction of office-power by the death, or departure of the moſt ſerious and zealous of their members, ſeeing it gives but too much reaſon to ſuſpect that they poſſeſſed but little zeal, and had but a very faint reliſh for ſeriouſneſs themſelves. What if the ſerious officers in churches were of different ſentiments from the miniſters, and thereby a little incommoded them? Seeing they profeſs themſelves to be gentlemen of ſuch univerſal charity and unimpeachable candour, ought not they to have borne with the ſuppoſed weakneſs of the Orthodox ſerious officers rather than to have deſtroyed the order aud diſcipline of the churches?

I am, Sir,

Your very humble Servant.

LETTER IX.

Reverend Sir,

IT is ſomething unaccountable to me that the lamentable ſtate of what you call the Rational churches with reſpect to church diſcipline, does not cauſe ſome doubt concerning the foundation upon which they build, and the religious ſentiments which they really hold, ſeeing you give it as your opinion, "*That every ſet of religious ſentiments muſt produce correſponding effects on the tempers and conduct of men.*" That the conduct of the Rational miniſters in their office character deſerveth but little praiſe you have very ſufficiently ſhewn, and therefore from your own axiom it will be inferred that a certain malignant influence is inſeperably connected with their ſentiments, which hath indeed been the opinion of ſome grave and intelligent perſons long before you or I was born. The change of conduct amongſt your churches is altogether as obvious as the revolution of their ſentiments from Orthodox to Rational is remarkable, the cauſe of which you have ingeniouſly accounted for in the conduct of their miniſters. It is indeed aſtoniſhing that, in the days of Orthodoxy when all the Diſſenters were as you think abſurd and irrational,

rational, yea even idolaters † that their churches ſhould have been built on a regular goſpel plan, and that their more Rational deſcendants in theſe days of ſuch enlightened reaſon ſhould confeſſedly "*be deſtitute of the common requiſite of growth, or even the continuance of any ſociety whatever.* ‡" This being evidently the caſe with them, your cenſure, "*that with all their ſuperior knowledge they are deſtitute of what they call common ſenſe,* §" ſeems to be extremely pertinent and judicious. That a goodly meaſure of common ſenſe fell to the lot of my old friends the puritanical Diſſenters, notwithſtanding their idolatry, in worſhipping the Son according to the divine command ‖, even as they worſhipped the Father, and other abſurdities of which they were guilty as you clearly demonſtrate, pag. 50. In your very friendly debate with your Rev. brother Enfield you have in great modeſty laid the charge of idolatry againſt all Athanaſians, and expreſſed your wonder that he ſhould endeavour to vindicate them from your charge, as he is ſaid to have done in *his trimming buſineſs of a Diſſenter*, &c. You know the Puritans in general were Athanaſians, and therefore according to you, idolaters. Moreover you are pleaſed frequently to give us an hint of the abſurdity and inconſiſtency of the Calviniſtical doctrines, which being conſidered as the oppoſite of Rational doctrines muſt by you be underſtood as irrational; of courſe the caſe ſtands thus, "the old Puritans

† Dr. Prieſtley's Letter to Mr. Enfield.

‡ Page 134.

§ Page 133.

‖ John v. 23, *That all men ſhould honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath ſent him.*

were

were both irrational and idolatrous, yet after all had common ſenſe enough to form their churches upon a regular goſpel plan, as you tell us, and to maintain a ſtrictneſs of diſcipline ſubſervient to the beſt of purpoſes. Nor was this the caſe in one or two communities as a wonder of order amidſt their abſurdities; but on your own teſtimony it was ſo univerſally, "*for* all *the Puritans and Preſbyterians formed their churches upon this plan.* ‖" It is very ſtrange, Doctor, that with all your Rationality, "this regular form of a church and the diſcipline to which it is ſubſervient ſhould be now almoſt univerſally grown into diſuſe with you." According to the eaſy rules of common ſenſe, it muſt be very difficult to account for it, how men who are inconſiſtent and irrational ſhould maintain regularity and order, whilſt the Rational and intelligent, or as you more emphatically ſtile them, perſons of ſuperior knowledge, have not even the remoteſt idea of church order; inſomuch that as you ſay, "there is hardly the face of any thing that may be called diſcipline among you."

You cannot think, Sir, how it pleaſes me to find ſuch a gentleman as yourſelf, touching ſo frequently on the marvellous: of which we

‖ "The Engliſh Puritans however, ſo early as Q. Elizabeth's reign, propoſed to change the church-wardens and overſeers of the poor into elders and deacons, *Neale*, vol. 1. page 232. They held that the elders joined with the miniſters ſhould be overſeers of the manners and converſation of all the congregation; that they ſhould be choſen out of the graveſt and moſt diſcreet members, that they ſhould alſo be of ſome note in the world, and able if poſſible to maintain themſelves. As far, ſays Dr. Prieſtley, as their circumſtances would permit, all the old Puritans and Presbyterians formed their churches upon this plan; but this *regular form of a church*, and the diſcipline to which it was ſubſervient, are now almoſt univerſally grown into diſuſe among us."

have

have yet another inſtance in page 37, "*the whole ſyſtem of diſcipline among the Independents has no countenance in our only rule of faith and duty, and no example for many centuries in the Chriſtian church.*" That this ſhould be the caſe is not ſo ſtrange, as to have it aſſerted by Dr. Prieſtley; who in the laſt paſſage I had the honour of quoting from him, highly applauds the ſame ſyſtem of church diſcipline. Had you read, Dr. Owen on Church Diſcipline for the old Puritans, and Mr. Maurice's Social Religion exemplified, on the part of modern Independents you muſt have ſeen that there is in fact no material difference between them. Therefore how *that* of the old Puritans was ſo regular and orderly, and *this* of the Independents, ſo univerſally unſcriptural, abſurd, and dangerous, are matters of no ſmall importance, and will require a genius not inferior to your own to determine. Nevertheleſs were I to give my own ſentiments upon the ſubject, I ſhould think that, "*an almoſt perfect uniformity of faith, and alſo the religion of the heart with reſpect to God,*"* are far from being proper objects of ridicule, and ſhould ſuppoſe that this may have at leaſt a remote likeneſs to what the apoſtle means by "being of one mind," and ſurely an almoſt perfect uniformity of faith is better than to have no faith at all; which if I underſtand you a right, you ſuppoſe may be the caſe with not only Rational Diſſenters, but even with their very officers. "*In this manner truth might be propogated more ſilently; and if once* the elders, or the majority of them were convinced, *there would be leſs difficultly in bringing over the reſt* †."

* Page 34. † Page 112.

'Tis

'Tis very true Sir, that when gentlemen of the Rational order are pleased to take the propogation of *truth* into their own hands, they have need to use all their cunning, and go as silently about it as possible; though to be sure the scripeural method of propogating the gospel was somewhat more noisy, and its first preachers lifted up their voices like a trumpet, and shunned not to declare the whole council of God: but I suppose that two schemes so very different as the gospel preached by the apostles, and Rational religion as defined by Dr. Priestley, must needs require methods of propogation equally different. I have always been of opinion that truth could hold up her countenance in the face of the sun, but you seem to be of a contrary opinion; and as I am not yet satisfied in my own infallibility, I shall not be too strenuous in this point, but shall reserve my anathema till a fitter occasion.

I really wonder whether or not you are serious Doctor, in advising your people to choose elders whether they are convinced of the truth, or enemies to it? I have been so accustomed to consider Paul's epistles to Timothy and Titus, as containing good and authentic rules, for forming a just idea of the qualities of church officers, that with me an elder who is not as yet convinced of the truth, appears to be an odd kind of an animal; but no matter for that, seeing I have not the honour of being counted a Rationalist. Yet in *our* way of judging of things by common sense without any pretence to superior knowledge, we should think a man who is yet unconvinced of the truth, however rich, far from being the fittest man in the world for watching over the conversation of a religious society.

Moreover

Moreover, we ſhould be apt to conclude that a conſiſtory formed of one Rational miniſter, and twelve unbelieving elders, is ſuch a convention, as the wiſdom of all the apoſtles could not have deviſed.

There is yet another thing in which the firſt preachers of the goſpel and you are by no means agreed as to the choice of church officers; and what is very obſervable, Sir, is, that what you take to be a neceſſary quality for office power was never once thought on by them, any more than you have thought of what they accounted neceſſary. In page 86, you direct "*that one of the wealthieſt be choſen for an elder.*" But they never once thought of riches or poverty in the caſe of chooſing deacons, but ſimply directed to chooſe "*men full of faith and of the Holy Ghoſt,*" as very ſufficient through divine aſſiſtance for ſuſtaining offices in a goſpel church. After all it muſt needs be confeſſed that churches which are eſtabliſhed upon a different foundation, will require officers poſſeſt of different qualifications: how far this may be the caſe with the Rational Diſſenters, I hope you do not expect me to determine. One thing I muſt take the liberty of cautioning you againſt, Doctor, and that is to beware of flattering yourſelf that you are the firſt who found out that riches are a neceſſary qualification for a church officer; for I can aſſure you that the Orthodox Diſſenters themſelves, abſurd as you think them, have been in poſſeſſion of this ſecret for time immemorial, and in the whole extent of this great metropolis you will not find one poor man a deacon in any church whatever, providing always that, there be any rich men belonging to the community. Ay, Sir! ſo univerſal is this rule, that you cannot give a trade-

man a better character as being a good man in worldly circumſtances, than to ſay *he is a deacon of ſuch a church*; therefore it will be ungenerous for you in future to pretend that Rational religion dwells wholly with your people, ſeeing I have proved to a demonſtration that in the article of chooſing their officers, the Orthodox are as Rational as yourſelves. Further, if my informer deceives me not, the Sandemanian church in St. Martin's le Grand, that mirror of goſpel ſimplicity, is pretty obſervant of the ſame rule, and her elders are thought to ſtand upon a par with the deacons of other churches, in reſpect to the good things of this life. Indeed it is pretty obvious, that thoſe ſame elders, who receive nothing for preaching, are full as comfortable as the Diſſenting miniſters who live entirely by the goſpel. I cannot but admire their prudence in chooſing to be put into trade, whereby they may procure hundreds inſtead of the few ſcores of pounds uſually raiſed by ſubſcription. This wiſe choice hath two very great advantages attending it; firſt, it gives them an authority equal to that of rich lay-elders, becauſe of their equal independancy; and ſecondly, it gives them authority to treat thoſe miniſters with contempt, whoſe ſubſiſtence entirely depends on the ſubſcriptions of their people. Indeed, Sir, to be put into an handſome way of trade by the generoſity of a church is at leaſt equivalent to a very good annual ſtipend; beſides the many other advantages connected with it. How then can you pretend that reaſon dwells only with you, ſeeing the very Sandemanians themſelves outſtrip you in making comfortable proviſions for their preachers, even when they give themſelves out to be the moſt diſintereſted race of human beings?

I give

I give it as my opinion, that whenever the Orthodox ſhall take it into their heads to make proviſion for their teachers after the example of that *only church* in St. Martins le grand, they will find but little oppoſition from their miniſters, who would be every whit as well contented with two hundred pounds per annum, in a way of trade, as with one hundred in a way of ſubſcription; and I dare anſwer for it, that the good women their wives will unanimouſly vote for the Sandemanian plan, whenever the affair is agitated.

As you obſerve, Sir, with reſpect to yourſelf, ſo I may ſay that, "*I am far from cenſuring thoſe perſons who are merely miſled,*" yet I think they are very worthy of cenſure who, pretending to *ſuperior knowledge* themſelves, neglect the true, the only ſpring of ſpiritual intelligence more and more every day, as you tells us, is the caſe with the Rational Diſſenters of your acquaintance; with whom "*it is notorious that the ſcriptures are every day more neglected, ſo that it is juſtly to be feared that in a few generations, our poſterity will have but a very imperfect idea of the contents of thoſe ſacred books*", which with me is by no means an inconteſtible proof, either of their ſuperior knowledge or piety, and may be thought by ſome to be but a very flimſy ground for their boaſted Rationality. I am entirely of your opinion that the ſcriptures are grown almoſt into a total diſuſe with the Rational Diſſenters; miniſters as well as people; for ſuch of them whom I have heard preach, moſt evidently drew more of their matter from Plato, Socrates, and Seneca, than from the diſciples of our Lord in their writings of inſpi-

ration. That poſterity is likely to have but a very imperfect idea of the contents of thoſe ſacred books muſt certainly be admitted, ſeeing ſo many teachers have already attained to that degree of Rationality. When the apoſtles of your perſuaſion firſt began to exclaim againſt creeds, confeſſions, and ſyſtems in general, it was done under a pretence of adhering more cloſely to the inſpired writings. Creeds, articles, and confeſſions of faith, bodies of divinity, and catechims, are all gone Dr. Prieſtley, and muſt the bible itſelf likewiſe be ſuperanuated? What rule do you think thoſe gentlemen will next embrace? Dr. Harwood has done all that could be expected from ſuch a circumſcribed genius to throw the New Teſtament into a more polite and gentleman-like form, but alas! there is this ſmall diſadvantage attending his (what ſhall I call it) verſion, that even Rational gentlemen, poſſeſſed of the ſmalleſt degree of either piety or common ſenſe, can hardly give him thanks for his labours. But that the bible which we make uſe of ſhould grow daily into more general diſuſe is what might reaſonably be expected, ſeeing it is ſo very full of Orthodoxy, and teſtifies very ſolemnly againſt the leading ſentiments of the Rational Diſſenters. When the old faſhioned bible is grown into abſolute diſuſe with your people, and they are unanimouſly agreed to have a new one, better adapted to their views of things, if they ſhould do me the honour to petition my advice on the occaſion, I ſhall refer them to the Rev. Dr. Harwood who may as well undertake to make a new bible as to mend the old one. If they can but procure a bible of Dr. Harwood's compoſing, with annotations by George Williams, gentleman's ſervant, his intimate friend, they will

will be on a fair way of being as Rational as the moſt rational of Indians.

Now Dr. Prieſtley to give you another proof of my freedom with you, which is always a token of friendſhip, give me leave to tell you that the Orthodoxy which I approve, is all ſummed up, and lies very obvious in this little old bible of mine; nor do I hope ever to be able to hold a man to be rational or irrational, but as he adheres to or departs from, the lovely beauty of its divine contents. I think I ſhall envy no man his Orthodoxy on the one hand, nor his Rationality on the other, if I may but ſee the lovelineſs of Jeſus in the ſcriptures and by them be made wiſe unto ſalvation.

I really think that it is not unworthy of the moſt Rational of all the Rational Diſſenters to enquire ſeriouſly into the cauſe of this growing neglect of the ſcripture which you ſpeak of; and ſhould it be found that it is in the miniſtry itſelf, ſuitable meaſures for remedying the evil will, I hope, be thought the next object worthy of attention. It does not appear to me, that any thing has a more direct tendency to bring the ſcriptures into a contemptible diſuſe, than the manner of preaching practiſed by ſome miniſters, whoſe orations or harangues ſeem to have no dependance upon, or connection with, the ſacred writings. Lectures on natural or indeed moral philoſophy, are very far from leading the ſoul to Jeſus as its all ſufficient dependance, and however excellent as a ſcience, is contemptible, baſe, and ſpurious, when it aſſumes the name of goſpel. Were Jeſus Chriſt and him crucified more the preacher's theme, and inſtead of embelliſhing his compoſition by the flouriſhes of art and ſcience, he ſtudied to recommend the word to every man's conſcience.

I think

I think the people would be under a neceſſity with the Bereans to ſearch the ſcriptures, that they might know the truth of the doctrine.

Now, Sir, to come to a concluſion, give me leave to obſerve to you that, if to deſpiſe and vilify the Orthodox becauſe they differ from me; if to boaſt of my own ſuperior knowledge; if to hold ſentiments in private, which I dare not openly avow; if to abolish church officers, and let go the reins of diſcipline; and if to diſuſe the ſcriptures is what is called Rational religion, I muſt beg to be excuſed from embracing her, notwithſtanding

I am, Sir,

Your ſincere well-wiſher,

and humble ſervant.

FINIS.

This Day is publiſhed,

(By virtue of his Majeſty's Letters Patent granted ſolely to H. FOUGT, for his new improved MUSICAL TYPES) Price Four Shillings, neatly bound in red Leather.

THE UNIVERSAL PSALMODIST; Containing, 1. A Complete Introduction to Pſalmody; or, the Art of Singing Pſalms, &c. interſperſed with many uſeful Scales and Examples, carefully laid down and explained in a Familiar Dialogue between Maſter and Scholar. 2. A choice and valuable Collection of Pſalm and Hymn Tunes, Canons, and Anthems, many of which were never before publiſhed; alſo the Tunes, Anthems, &c. ſung at the Magdalen and Foundling Chapels, and other public Places in and about London, with Words adapted to each Tune. The whole compoſed in a new and eaſy Taſte, for two, three, and four, but generally for four Voices, in the moſt familiar Keys and Cliffs, according to the Advice and Direction of the moſt eminent Maſters in London. Calculated to promote and improve this moſt excellent part of ſocial Worſhip, and thereby render it both uſeful and delightful in all country Choirs, as well as in the Congregations and other religious Societies in England, Ireland, and America.

Originally publiſhed under the name of A. WILLIAMS, Teacher of Pſalmody in London. And now firſt in this FOURTH EDITION, corrected throughout by an able Maſter, with the Addition of many Tunes, and one Anthem, not in any of the former Editions.

Printed for J. JOHNSON, No. 72. in St. Paul's Church-Yard; of whom may be had, ROYAL HARMONY, being a choice Collection of the moſt valuable Anthems, by Mr. WILLIAMS, price 7s. 6d.

This Day are published,

I. PRIESTCRAFT DEFENDED, a Sermon occasioned by the Expulsion of SIX YOUNG GENTLEMEN from the University of OXFORD, for *praying*, *reading*, and *expounding* the Scriptures. Humbly dedicated to Mr. V—— C——r, and the Heads of Houses, by their Humble Servant the SHAVER. Price 6d. the Twelfth Edition corrected.

II. THE LIFE OF JOSEPH, THE SON OF ISRAEL, in Eight Books. Designed chiefly for the Use of Youth. By the same Author. Price 2s. 6d. sewed.

III. DEATH, A VISION; Or, the Solemn Departure of Saints and Sinners, represented under the Similitude of a DREAM. The Third Edition corrected and much enlarged. By JOHN MACGOWAN. Price 2s. sewed.

Printed for G. KEITH, in Gracechurch-Street; and J. JOHNSON, No. 72, St. Paul's Church-Yard.